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# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XI, NUMBER 1    NEW SERIES 1990

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Daniel L. Migliore, EDITOR

Jane Dempsey Douglass, BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

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## Always in Need of Reform

ARE WE witnessing a renewal of interest in Reformed theology in the Presbyterian church today? There are at least a few signs that point in this direction. One could mention the new brief statement of faith that was commissioned by the General Assembly several years ago and that will soon come before the church for final discussion and action; the rising expectations of many Presbyteries that candidates for ordination be well-versed in the Reformed theological tradition; and the growing awareness that as we enter the final decade of this century the social, cultural, and spiritual crises of our world are so formidable as to compel us all to take up the theological task with new seriousness.

Preoccupation with a particular theological tradition can of course be more problematic than promising. It could signal retreat to a romanticized past; it could mean that the church is anxious, defensive, uncertain of itself and its future, and hence eager to find safety and security in what is familiar and provincial. But we venture to hope that the new interest in the Presbyterian church in what it means to be Reformed has a very different basis. Anxiety for a narrow denominational identity has never been what the Reformed theological heritage has stood for at its best. Neither Calvin nor Edwards nor Barth, giants of the Reformed tradition, construed his theological responsibility in narrow terms. Their major writings—*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, *The End for Which God Created the World*, and *The Church Dogmatics*—intended to serve the Word of God that gathers, nourishes, and commissions the whole church. For Reformed theology it is this Word of God decisively spoken in Jesus Christ that again and again summons the church and theology to reform of faith and life. Willingness to let God begin anew with us, openness to God's transforming and reordering judgment and grace—this is Reformed existence.

As is well-known to readers of this journal, the spirit of the Reformed tradition is enshrined in the motto, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*: the church reformed, always in need of reform. This motto covers every aspect of the life of the church, including and especially its theology. Sovereignty of God, elect people, salvation by grace alone, authority of Scripture, the sanctification of every dimension of life—these and other great motifs of the Reformed tradition are not slogans to be mechanically repeated but themes that require fresh interpretation in concrete situations. Reformed theology needs to be continually liberated from routinization and misuse for the

faithful proclamation and service of the living Word of God. Perhaps the astonishing movements of political and social reform sweeping Eastern Europe today will help to remind us of the global importance of the witness of the Christian church to a way of life that is always ready to be reformed.

In different ways the articles in this issue display the vitality and promise, the diversity and tensions, of Reformed theology today. Describing what is distinctive about Reformed theology, Jane Dempsey Douglass underscores the point that it represents not a fossilized but a living and growing tradition of faith. Diogenes Allen explores the new openness to faith in our "post-modern" situation and calls the church to a new confidence in presenting the full wealth of Christian conviction. Charles West reexamines the life and legacy of the influential Reformed Czechoslovakian theologian, Joseph Hromadka, who taught theology and ethics at Princeton from 1939 to 1947. George Marsden reconsiders the work of a very different but no less controversial Princeton theologian, J. Gresham Machen. Finally, Raymond Fung contends that the world-wide Christian mission needs to show the spirit of continuing reform since it can no longer be carried out in a one-sided, imperialistic manner but must be a mission in "waiting" as well as in "reaching out."

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE  
EDITOR

# What is “Reformed Theology”?

by JANE DEMPSEY DOUGLASS

*Jane Dempsey Douglass is the Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Historical Theology at Princeton Seminary. She is a graduate of Syracuse University, Radcliffe College Graduate School, and Harvard University where she received her Ph.D. A Reformation scholar, her most recent book is Women, Freedom, and Calvin. Last summer Dr. Douglass was elected Vice-President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at its meeting in Seoul, Korea. The following lecture was presented at a meeting of New Brunswick Presbytery in September, 1989.*

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to talk briefly this evening about what is characteristic or special about Reformed theology. In preparing this presentation, I have reflected especially on two experiences.

1. In recent years I have been serving on the committee preparing a proposed Brief Statement of Reformed Faith. Our final draft was presented to the General Assembly in June and is now being studied by a special committee. As you can imagine from the title assigned to us, much of the committee's initial work was to identify what “Reformed faith” is. We presented a statement which we believed was an example or model of contemporary Reformed theology. We hoped that churches working with it and reflecting on it would develop a sense that they hold a common Reformed theology. So I will draw upon that document in my remarks.

2. Last month I participated in the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), held in Seoul, Korea. Here Reformed people from all over the world were *doing* theology. Delegates came from about 170 churches in very different contexts, two-thirds of them in the third world. The theme of the Council was one very central to our faith: “Who do you say that I am?,” Jesus’ question to Peter. Our Bible study focused on the confessions of Peter in Matthew 16 and of Martha in John 11; the agenda of many working sessions was explicitly theological, concerned with common witness, mission and unity, and the program on peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. Therefore I had a splendid opportunity to listen to a variety of Reformed voices and to check my own perceptions about Reformed theology.

Since the thirty minutes at my disposal correspond more to a sermon period than an academic lecture hour, I shall make three points:

I. Reformed theology is catholic reflection focused on what God does in the world and how God calls us to participate in God's work.

II. Reformed theology is done in, with, and for confessing Christian communities and for the world. Though individual persons contribute to it, it is not intended to be solitary, private work but rather belongs to the community.

III. Reformed theology is not a body of writing completed in the past but a tradition of doing theology in a Reformed mode, certainly in continuity with the classical Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century like Calvin and Bullinger, for example, and with the confessions of that tradition, like those in our *Book of Confessions*. But Reformed theology is still in the making, still unfinished, and will be till the end of time.

Now let me elaborate a little on each of these points.

I. Reformed theology is catholic reflection focused on what God does in the world and how God calls us to participate in God's work.

A. At the heart of Reformed theology is the biblical faith we hold in common with the whole Christian family of all times and places: belief in one God in three persons, who created all that is, who was incarnate in Jesus Christ our redeemer, who in the Holy Spirit is still acting to recreate the world; belief in one church and its sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; belief in life beyond death as part of the new creation God is already preparing among us.

The proposed Brief Statement of Faith is such a catholic confession, trinitarian in structure, though following the order of the Apostolic Benediction rather than the more familiar one of the Apostles' Creed. This order, beginning with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is particularly congenial to Reformed people who have so often declared the central importance of Jesus Christ for all our knowledge of God. If the statement did not clearly confess the faith catholic, it would not be a Reformed statement.

Because Reformed people begin with this assumption about the catholic nature of Reformed theology, we have been deeply engaged in ecumenical encounter. Since the last General Council meeting of WARC in 1982, at the world level WARC has been engaged in bilateral dialogues with Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox churches, and especially those of other traditions stemming from the Reformation: Lutheran, Baptist, Mennonite, Methodist, Disciples of Christ. Reports are available and are studied by our church at the national level; the WARC General Council expressed its concern that they need to be studied also by presbyteries and local congregations. In each case the reports call on us to take some new steps in life together, steps which finally must involve local congregations. Our conviction about our catholicity is not merely an intellectual recognition of past

consensus but an imperative to be engaged in the creation of new consensus and new life together.

B. Our Reformed focus within that catholic tradition is on God's action, God's initiative, God's self-revelation to us, God's calling us into the community of faith. It is not a self-centered tradition, primarily concerned with making ourselves happy or comfortable. In the short run it may make us very uncomfortable, land us in prison, and set us in tension with our culture. But we believe that life according to the will of God shown to us in Scripture, participating in the work God is doing in the world, is joyful freedom and finally the only source of security and comfort.

Focusing on God's action, out of the various historical streams of Christian theology we have emphasized the Reformation themes which are important to us but not unique to us: "by Christ alone"—the once-for-all redemptive work of Christ, God in human flesh; "by grace alone," "by faith alone"—faith and justification as a gift of God, not by our own efforts; "by Scripture alone"—the unique authority of God's Word coming to us through the record of a believing community's experience of God's work in its midst. This history of God's work in the world is the foundation of our theological reflection and the standard by which finally we judge all theology.

Mention of "scripture alone" may evoke concern about how little some of our American church-goers really know about the Bible and its contents. What could "scripture alone" possibly mean to them? But I was struck at the WARC General Council by the vivid experience of many of our churches of living by authority of Scripture. In a group discussing the mission of the Church, delegates were asked what role the Bible played in shaping their vision of that mission. Some Asian delegates spoke of how their church had been changed from a rather pietistic community with mostly otherworldly concerns by serious confrontation with the parable of the last judgment, Mt. 25. As they heard Jesus speak of being hungry, thirsty, in prison, Jesus was asking them, Where were you? Their churches had to broaden their sense of mission to include work for social change and support for those in every kind of need. A delegate from an Asian united church spoke of how Jesus' prayer that all may be one in John 17 had led his church into an ecumenical union. The sense of the transforming Word of God at work in our midst by the Holy Spirit, so powerful in the sixteenth-century Reformation, is still very much alive today in many of our Reformed churches.

To serve one sovereign God is to recognize the profound reality of sin in our world as a distortion of God's intent for human life, and to work against



all evil and resist all idolatry. Ours is the tradition which quite literally felt itself called to pull down what it believed to be the symbols of idolatry of church and state in the sixteenth century: the religious statues and stained-glass windows. Today most Reformed people find those attacks on religious art to be evidence of misdirected zeal. Still, we understand that they were part of a much broader reform of church and society and respect the underlying intent: to refocus the church's attention on the authority of the Word of God and its call to reform all of human life according to a scriptural vision of God's will for the world. Grateful obedience involves a reordering of values and priorities in the life of the church as well as the world. The Holy Spirit is continually at work reforming the church by opening our hearts so we can *really* hear the Word of God. (See echoes of this tradition in the proposed Brief Statement of Faith, lines 5-6, 26, 48-50, 55-59.)

Today one example of this continuing tradition of Reformed struggle against idolatry is the deep engagement of many of our churches in work for human rights against idolatrous claims of states. At the General Council I met the Rev. Chung Ming Kao, former moderator of the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, for whom many of us prayed during the seven years he spent in prison as the result of his involvement in the struggle for human rights in his country. He speaks quite simply and gratefully of the new and much broader vision of the mission of the church which God gave him and his church through this experience of suffering. Our WARC President, Allan Boesak, has been detained by civil authorities at least twice since the Council meeting for his role in the movement of defiance of apartheid, a struggle against an idolatrous view of the state. He and his colleagues there understand that God is calling them to participate in God's peace-making and justice-making work in their part of the world. I hope you are praying regularly for them.

The basic content of the proposed new Brief Statement of Faith is a narrative of what God has been doing: in creation, in the covenant with Sarah and Abraham, in the incarnation, in Jesus' earthly ministry—proclaiming the reign of God, in his death and resurrection. But these actions of God continue into the present. The Holy Spirit assures us that we belong to this God, calls us into a redemptive community formed by Word and sacrament, and gives us courage to engage in mission in the world:

to witness to Christ as Lord and Saviour  
to unmask idolatries in church and culture  
to work for justice, freedom, and peace,  
and to claim all of life for Christ. (lines 55-59)

We see that the focus on God's action does not imply a denigration of human capacity and activity. On the contrary, Reformed theology has stressed the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and strengthen sinful human beings so that they become more fully human, bearing the image of God more visibly, able to do God's work in the world more boldly.

Finally, a focus on God's action has led Reformed people to a profound worship of God who can never be fully known by a human being, but who reveals to us divine power and righteousness, compassion and forgiveness, inspiring in us grateful praise. To God alone be the glory!

II. Reformed theology is done in, with, and for confessing Christian communities and for the world. It is not intended to be solitary or private work, but rather belongs to the community. Very briefly, I think this thesis has several important roots and implications.

A. All our life, as human beings and as Christians, is marked by interdependence. The image of God given at creation is a corporate one, shared by all humanity, a reflection, perhaps, of the community within the divine Trinity. In recreating us the Holy Spirit draws us into the one church, the body of Christ. (See Brief Statement of Faith, lines 26-29, 45-47.)

B. A theological education is not a personal possession but rather a trust for the work of the whole Christian community. An essential part of the pastor's calling is to enable lay people, too, to become good theologians. All Christians need the tools of theological reflection to make decisions about the life of the congregation or the General Assembly and about their personal lives. Our Reformed tradition is not one of a hierarchy, but of collegial ministry where leadership and theological skills must be shared. This sharing, however, cannot be one-sided; lay people, too, have gifts from the Holy Spirit and from their human experience to share. If pastors are open to learning from lay people about their particular experience of God and of the world, and lay people to sharing their pastors' theological education, if both men and women from all racial and ethnic backgrounds can reflect theologically together on their different life experiences, a wonderfully strong foundation for the church's mission could be built.

C. Reformed people explore together their understanding of the Scriptures and its claim on their lives. They know that every human being is fallible and that the church is both holy, because the Holy Spirit lives in it, and also sinful, because of the fallibility of even the most faithful Christian. Therefore in congregations, in presbyteries, in General Assemblies, and in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we feel accountable to one another, struggling together to know the will of God, challenging one another

when we feel it is necessary. Today we respect the fact that there is pluralism in all our churches; our people do not all express themselves theologically in the same way. But there come times—the sixteenth-century Reformation, the Barmen Declaration in the days of Nazi Germany, and the 1982 suspension by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches of the membership of churches teaching a theological justification of apartheid—when decisive choices must be made; the people of God must be willing to hear God's word to us from our brothers and sisters even when it is painful and costly.

A new theological project was undertaken by the WARC General Council in Seoul: a theological study of the nature of legitimate and illegitimate government and the grounds on which resistance to government would be justified. In this project WARC will be picking up again a major theme of Reformed theology in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Though obedience was one of the greatest virtues in the minds of sixteenth-century people, and Reformed theology valued it, still the question of resistance to tyranny became an important issue in Reformed thought. Today our churches in South Africa, eastern Europe, and militantly Islamic countries are particularly concerned about these questions. But even in America and western Europe the questions are being raised, though in different ways. It will be important for Reformed Christians in very different situations to face together the theological issues involved in our relations to governments today.

III. Reformed theology is still in the making, still unfinished, and will be till the end of time. Let me suggest a few examples.

A. We have mentioned the issue of apartheid. Certainly many of our own ancestors did not understand slavery and racial discrimination to be evil. Today we believe the Holy Spirit leads us to read the Bible very differently than they did. Today, when we say in the proposed Brief Statement of Faith that everyone, male and female, of every race and people is equally made in God's image to live as one community (lines 26-29), we are giving needed new shape to the tradition of Reformed theology, building on a profoundly biblical understanding of human nature which, by the grace of God, is being seen more and more clearly.

B. Many Reformed theologians, from Calvin on, have had beautiful visions of the significance of the created world. But Reformed confessions have had little to say about the non-human world and about the ethical responsibility of humanity to it. Perhaps partly as a result of that failure to develop more fully the doctrine of creation, human abuse of the world



threatens its death. You will see in the proposed new Brief Statement of Faith that we confess failure to care for the planet entrusted to our care as one of our sins (line 34). This, too, is a needed new shaping of the Reformed tradition of theology. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches some time ago undertook a project on Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation which has been taken up also by the World Council of Churches. Reformed churches worldwide, along with others, are now deeply invested in exploring more profoundly a Christian doctrine of creation.

C. Sometimes in our ecumenical partnerships we have to confess our sins against our neighbors quite particularly. Both we and the Lutherans have declared that our mutual condemnations in the sixteenth century are no longer applicable. In a dialogue of Reformed people with the Mennonites, the Reformed formally expressed their deep sense of shame and profound regret for their persecution, even putting to death, of the Anabaptists in previous times. Such confessions of wrongdoing are necessary to allow new relationships to be built on just foundations.

Today it almost seems easier to put aside old wrongs with other traditions than with our own. The WARC General Council considered at length the problem of Reformed divisiveness, the existence of many different unreconciled Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the same country. In the USA we have several. Korea, we were told, has more than 50, of which only two are members of WARC. Reconciliation and unity within the Christian family and even within the Reformed family remain on the theological agenda.

D. Another theological issue much under discussion in Reformed churches around the world is the ordination of women. Our own PC(USA) church long ago agreed as a matter of polity that women could be ordained as elders and pastors. In the proposed Brief Statement of Faith, we now take another step and declare as a matter of faith that the Holy Spirit calls both men and women to all ministries of the church (line 53). There are Presbyterian denominations both in America and in some other countries which do not agree. Some cite "theological" objections, some "cultural" ones; but the relation between those two sorts of objections is itself a theological problem.

The problem of bars to women's ordination, either formal and official or informal and private, was a major concern at the women's conference immediately preceding the WARC General Council. Since only one Korean church ordains women, Korean women were very eager for action by the Council which would support their efforts to change the other churches' policies. In an extraordinary symbolic action, throngs of Korean women,

some traveling many hours, attended a deeply moving communion service which concluded the women's conference. A woman minister, Prof. Sang Chang, who was related to this presbytery during her years of doctoral study at Princeton Theological Seminary, presided over the service and preached the sermon. (Dr. Chang was later elected Moderator of the Department of Cooperation and Witness of WARC.) Other women delegates to the Council from different parts of the world shared in the leadership of the service and the serving of communion. For many women present, this must have been a first experience of women's leadership in public worship and of receiving the sacrament from the hands of women. A prayer vigil then continued into the morning hours.

The Council did in fact strongly urge all its member churches which do not yet ordain women to move promptly toward removing bars to their ordination, and it urged all churches to work for more fair and full participation of women in all aspects of church life. On the question of women's place in the Church, Reformed theology is taking new shape out of a different and, I believe, profoundly faithful reading of Scripture, focused on the new community in Christ where there is no male or female and where all human barriers fall.

In these ways and many more, the Holy Spirit continues to lead us towards new insight into the Word of God and towards ongoing reformation of our theology and our church.

# The End of the Modern World: A New Openness for Faith

by DIOGENES ALLEN

*Diogenes Allen is the Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary where he has taught since 1967. A member of the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton and author of ten books, he is an ordained Presbyterian minister and a frequent speaker in local congregations. This essay is adapted from his most recent book, Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction. © 1989 Diogenes Allen and used by permission of Westminster/John Knox Press.*

## I

TO HAVE a faith to live by is a great comfort and support, especially in times when there is great intellectual disagreement and rapid change. But now and again I have met a person who has claimed that religion has nothing to offer. "Why should I go to church," someone once said to me, "when I have no religious needs?" I had the audacity to reply, "Because Christianity's true." That may seem foolhardy when we live in a pluralistic world with any number of different views of reality and apparently no rational means of telling which view is most likely to be true, and when it is said that all views are historically relative and mere reflections of social structures. Even scientific laws and theories are to be held tentatively. How can any educated person who is not simply dogmatic claim that a religion is true?

Nonetheless, I find myself driven to make this claim. The needs religion fills are relevant to an assessment of its truth, but were it merely a matter of finding religion to be helpful, then a religious commitment would not be essentially different from a personal preference. We would rightly say that just as some people prefer chocolate to other flavors of ice cream, some people prefer to be Christian rather than something else or nothing at all merely as a matter of taste. But when something is said to be true, we have a different situation, especially when it is said of a religion. Christian, as well as other religious claims, are so serious and so demanding personally that adherence to them cannot be properly described as merely a matter of personal taste.

Many people today find they cannot ignore their religion's claim to be true, and yet they are aware of various difficulties in affirming its truth. The modern world has driven a wedge between the mind and the heart, forcing Christians to lead a double life. On the one hand, there are more Christians in the world today and they are more widely distributed geographically than

ever before. In spite of immense increases in the world's population during the past five centuries, the percentage of Christians has increased from about 19 percent in 1500 to more than 34 percent in 1900. Since 1900 the world population has tripled, and the number of Christians has virtually tripled as well, keeping up with the population explosion. You must combine the number of Muslims (17.1 percent), Hindus (13.5 percent), and Buddhists (6.2 percent) to surpass the number of Christians in the world in 1985. Such growth reflects immense vitality.<sup>1</sup> In addition, of all the religions of the world none has been exposed to as intense and persistent critical examination as Christianity.

On the other hand, in spite of these accomplishments, Christianity has been on the defensive intellectually. On the basis of physics, biology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, people have claimed again and again that its day is over. The attitude toward Christianity that has increasingly dominated the intellectual culture in modern times was nicely captured in a comment made in 1878 by Max Müller, a distinguished anthropologist:

Every day, every week, every month, every quarter, the most widely read journals seem just now to vie with each other in telling us that the time for religion is past, that faith is a hallucination or an infantile disease, that the gods have at last been found out and exploded.<sup>2</sup>

The situation from the point of view of Christianity, however, is not as dire as it may seem. On the contrary, our situation is now far better than it has been in modern times because our intellectual culture is at a major turning point. A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modern world are collapsing, and we are entering a postmodern world. The principles forged during the Enlightenment

<sup>1</sup> David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6.

<sup>2</sup> As found in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1965), 100. Pritchard, one of the greatest field anthropologists of all times, critically demolishes the major theories in the social sciences that seek to undermine primitive and present-day religions with naturalistic accounts of the origin of religion, such as those to which Max Müller alludes and to theories formulated since Müller's day, such as Émile Durkheim's (1858-1917). Theologians, who are intimidated by Feuerbach's theory that divine beings are a projection of human nature, would do well to read Pritchard, as would philosophers of religion who refer uncritically to Sigmund Freud's theories on the origin of religion. Pritchard argues that these theories were bad science even in their own day.

(c. 1600-1780), which formed the foundations of the modern mentality, are crumbling.

We do not yet know what the future holds, but it is clear that a fundamental reevaluation of the Christian faith—free of the assumptions of the modern mentality that are generally hostile to a religious outlook—is called for. No longer can Christianity be put on the defensive, as it has been for the last three hundred years or so, because of the narrow view of reason and the reliance on classical science that are characteristic of the modern mentality. Not only are the barriers to Christian belief erected by the modern mentality collapsing, but philosophy and science, once used to undermine belief in God, are now seen in some respects as actually pointing toward God.

The breakdown of the modern mentality is evident in at least four areas. First, it has been taken for granted in the intellectual world that the idea of God is superfluous. We do not need God to account for anything. Subject after subject is studied in our universities without reference to God, so that anyone educated outside church schools or colleges, is given the impression that religious questions are not among the fundamental questions which any person who uses his or her head has to confront sooner or later. It is not merely a matter of the separation of church and state, because the same thing exists in many countries of Europe and in Canada where there is no such doctrine of separation.

But today there are fundamental developments in philosophy and cosmology that actually point toward God. It can no longer be claimed that philosophy and science have established that we live in a self-contained universe. Hume's and Kant's philosophical arguments that it is pointless to ask whether the universe has an external cause have recently been seriously revised in secular philosophical circles.<sup>3</sup> This radical change has been independently reinforced by recent developments in science, especially in cosmology. In both fields the questions arise, Why does the universe have this particular order, rather than another possible one? and Why does the universe exist? These questions point toward God as an answer, but it is beyond the capacity of those fields of inquiry to make a positive pronouncement on the matter. All they can say is that the order and existence of the universe pose real questions that they cannot answer and recognize that God is the sort of reality that would answer them.

This is a complete about-face. Both science and philosophy have been

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).



used for several centuries to exclude even the possibility of God. On strictly intellectual grounds, this can no longer rightly be done. This is a fundamentally different cultural situation.

Once the embargo on the possibility of God is lifted, it is easy to show that the issue of divine existence is intellectually inescapable and important. For example, human beings are goal-seeking. Our goals are numerous and in some instances conflicting. To be rational we must order them into some priority. This is true of us as individuals as well as members of various social and political groups.

To order our goals rationally, we must make a match between our needs, interests, and desires, on the one hand, and what the physical and social environments permit us reasonably to hope we can achieve, on the other hand. Our estimate is greatly affected by whether we think this universe is ultimate or not. An estimate based on the conviction that the universe is ultimate is significantly different from an estimate based on the view that it is not. So the need to direct and order our lives as individuals and as societies is a reason to pursue the question of the status of our universe. Our goal-seeking behavior renders the question of what is ultimate inescapable for rational agents.

Furthermore, our needs, aspirations, and desires are far greater than can be satisfied should this universe be all that there is. If the universe is ultimate, then we must greatly reduce our aspirations and suffer the frustration of many of our needs and desires. To assume that we must pay this price is rational and sensible only if we have examined the status of the universe, and indeed examined it seriously and carefully. If people are sensible, they would want to know, earnestly want to know, whether this universe is ultimate or not.

Christians, therefore, need not continue to be defensive. We, just as Socrates in ancient Greece, have a mission: to challenge the supposition that the status of the universe and our place in it have already been thoroughly settled by scientific and philosophic developments. On strictly scientific and philosophical grounds, we will show that science and philosophy do not explain everything. They do not establish what the status of our universe is nor our place in it. Both individuals and institutions, such as schools and universities, ought to consider and study anything that promises to shed light on our situation. We have the opportunity and task of turning people into seekers, as did Socrates.

The second breakdown of the modern mentality is the failure to find a basis for morality and society. A major project of the Enlightenment was to

base traditional morality and society on reason and not on religion. It sought to show by reason<sup>4</sup> alone that some things are wrong in nearly all circumstances, that to become a moral person is of supreme importance for an individual and society, and that moral behavior is objective and not a matter of individual choice nor relative to society. The deepest of all our traditional moral convictions is that every person has intrinsic value. But it has been argued recently that all attempts to give morality and society a secular basis are bankrupt.<sup>5</sup>

When as individuals and as a society we chose a traditional morality, heavily influenced by the best in Greek culture and Christianity, the failure in secular philosophy did not matter for practical purposes. But today traditional morality is being discarded, and we find ourselves unable to reach a consensus for action or even a basis for rational discussion on such matters as war, armaments, the distribution of wealth, medical ethics, and criminal justice. We find ourselves increasingly in the time of the Judges, in which each does what is right in his or her own eyes.

The third pillar of the Enlightenment is belief in inevitable progress. Modern science and technology so improved life that they led to a belief in progress, and in time to a belief in inevitable progress. People came to believe that science coupled with the power of education would free us from social bondage and vulnerability to nature. We are now faced with our failure to eradicate such serious social and economic problems as crime, pollution, poverty, racism, and war. We are becoming uneasy. We are beginning to feel that we may be able to surmount our difficulties, but it is not inevitable that we shall. The optimism of inevitable progress has become tarnished. There is an increasing recognition that evil is real and that it cannot be removed merely by educational and social reform. These difficulties do not mean that we are not to work and strive, but they do mean that we shall have to do so without the assurance that we are bound to succeed.

The fourth Enlightenment belief that is being questioned is the assumption that knowledge is inherently good. For centuries science has been regarded as unquestionably a force for good. We are indeed immeasurably better off because of it. But our conviction that science is intrinsically good and scientists inherently benefactors of humanity arose largely because the

<sup>4</sup> The philosophic views of reason that have dominated the modern period were so narrow that even science could not be conducted within their limited boundaries.

<sup>5</sup> See Basil Mitchell, *Morality: Religious and Secular* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1980), and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). The summary of the nature of traditional morality is taken from Mitchell.

morality that was part of the Greek and Christian heritage guided and restrained to some extent the uses to which scientific knowledge was put.

Today we are becoming increasingly aware that there is no inherent connection between knowledge and its beneficial use, with genetic engineering just beginning to open new possibilities of abuse, and with the power of bombs and other destructive forces at hand. Scientists do not control the uses to which their knowledge is put, and many even resist taking any responsibility for its uses. Within a moral order which is basically Christian, there is some prospect for controlling the use of scientific knowledge, or at least of restraining its destructive uses. There are perhaps some things which people impregnated with Christian attitudes will not do. However, the Christian order has been widely discredited by the Enlightenment. This has deprived us of one of the great resources for controlling the use of scientific knowledge.

We now realize that many of the reasons for thinking that Christianity is intellectually passé are unfounded. Recent work in the history of science has shown the indispensable contributions which Christianity made to the origins of modern science. We also realize that there is no inevitable conflict between science and religion. Finally, there is an increasing awareness that science does not explain everything.

In a postmodern world Christianity is intellectually relevant. It is relevant to the fundamental questions, Why does the world exist? and Why does it have its present order, rather than another? It is relevant to the discussion of the foundations of morality and society, especially on the significance of human beings. The recognition that Christianity is relevant to our entire society, and relevant not only to the heart but to the mind as well, is a major change in our cultural situation.<sup>6</sup>

"Postmodern," as I have characterized it, should not be confused with the

<sup>6</sup> There are several important works which document the breakdown of the modern mentality and which also refer to our situation today as postmodern. See Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World: A Search for Orientation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951); Frederick Ferré, *Shaping the Future: Resources for the Post-Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976); Houston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984). Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), traces the breakdown of the Enlightenment understanding of reason, mind, language, and knowledge from Descartes to the end of the analytic tradition. A superb brief statement of the significance of this breakdown for Christianity and a criticism of Rorty's own relativism is given by Richard J. Neuhaus in "After Modernity," *The Religion and Society Report* 5 (February 1988). The *Central Journal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) is devoted to addressing the implications for Christianity and our culture at large of the transition to a postmodern world.



way the term is used in theology today. Theology before Hume and Kant is "premodern," and the nineteenth-century theological attempts to come to terms with Hume, Kant, and their successors is "modern." "Postmodern" refers to four broad streams in theology, each of which criticizes modern, or as it is sometimes called, liberal theology. First is confessional theology, whose primary debt is to Karl Barth's attacks after the First World War on the liberal theology of the nineteenth century. Second is the existentialist-hermeneutical stream, which is primarily indebted to Heidegger, but whose roots go back to Schleiermacher's reflections on hermeneutics. Third, there is a very recent, small, theological deconstructionist stream, which is indebted to Heidegger and to an extent Jacques Derrida. Fourth, process theology, as derived from A. N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, has recently been characterized as postmodern.<sup>7</sup>

To avoid still another possible confusion, it is necessary to bear in mind the classification of periods used in physics. The main division is between classical science and modern science. "Classical science" (sometimes called "Newtonian science") refers to all science prior to the twentieth century. Modern science is usually said to have begun with Max Planck's discovery that energy is not emitted continuously but in discrete units or quanta. It is the development of *modern* science that has helped to undermine the *modern mentality* and to create the *postmodern* age.

## II

Although the intellectual situation today is vastly more favorable than it has been in recent centuries, the dust from the collapse of the modern mentality has not yet settled so that everyone can see clearly that we are in a new situation. In addition, many of the principles of the modern mentality have deeply penetrated Christianity itself. We have incorporated within Christian theology so many of the attitudes and convictions of the modern mentality that we have become incapable of achieving "the full wealth of conviction" that followers of Christ ought to have, according to Paul in his letter to the Colossians (2:2, NEB). Well-educated Christian people today are generally very far from enjoying the *full* wealth of conviction that it is possible for them to enjoy with complete intellectual integrity. Christian theology has yet to become postmodern.

<sup>7</sup> See David E. Klemm, "Toward a Rhetoric of Postmodern Theology: Through Barth and Heidegger," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (Fall 1987): 443-69; Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); David R. Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988).

The way the modern mentality continues to affect theology is splendidly captured in an allegory presented by Basil Mitchell in the 1986 Nathaniel Taylor Lectures at Yale University. Mitchell pictures traditional Christian theology as a barge going down a river. On one side of the river are shoals, which represent the works of David Hume and Immanuel Kant which enshrine some of the most serious intellectual barriers to Christian belief in modern times. To avoid these shoals, theologians have either jettisoned some of their cargo (Christian claims) to lighten the barge and sail safely over them, or they have swung sharply to the other bank to remain pre-modern. That is, they have either become modern by getting rid of lots of traditional Christian claims, sometimes even the claims that God is Creator and Redeemer in Christ, or they retain the language of traditional Christianity but at the price of repudiating in various degrees the need to take into account knowledge from any other domain. For those who remain pre-modern, Christian doctrines can be affirmed and discussed as if Hume's and Kant's objections simply do not exist. The primary directions of Christian theology have been either to accept the principles and outlook of the modern world and to minimize the distinctive content and basis of Christian doctrines, or to retain Christian doctrines verbally while isolating them from the present day and in effect remaining premodern. Fideism neglects the long historical development of the Bible and of Christian doctrines. Their development has always involved human reasoning. Fideism, often without realizing it, treats some specific interpretation of Scripture or a particular doctrinal formulation as though it sprang directly from the mind of God into human minds, rather than also requiring the use of the best estimates of knowledge that existed in various historical eras. Unless various views of scriptural inspiration, human nature, and conceptions of God in Christian theology are open to critical examination—an examination which includes our best estimates of what we believe to be true in other domains of inquiry—we are unable to determine which among the various views of theologians and churches are the most adequate and best able to guide us today in our lives and our understanding of God.

The way forward is forward. The principles of the modern mentality enshrined in Hume and Kant do not form an impassable barrier which we must either accept or avoid. The actual situation is that the barrier they and others formed has collapsed. Theologians no longer need to labor within the tight, asphyxiating little world of the Enlightenment or to become premodern. But those who continue to jettison Christian doctrines to float the remaining cargo over the shallow waters of modern intellectual culture and

those who continue to avoid modern intellectual culture do not realize this. They allow the thought of the modern world to determine the course to be followed by Christian theology. They remain prisoners of the modern mentality.

The situation has been splendidly described by the poet Christopher Fry in the very title of his play, *A Sleep of Prisoners*. We remain captives within a mental framework that has actually been broken. We are like prisoners who could walk out of a prison because all that would enclose us has been burst open, but we remain inside because we are asleep. Christopher Fry, however, tells us that this is the time to wake up:

The human heart can go to the lengths of God.  
Dark and cold we may be, but this  
Is no winter now. The frozen misery  
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move,  
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,  
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.  
Thank God our time is now when wrong  
Comes up to face us everywhere,  
Never to leave us till we take  
The longest stride of soul men ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.<sup>8</sup>

The nearness of the kingdom of God is evident not because things are getting better and better but because the issues and decisions to be made are becoming clearer and clearer, and therefore harder and harder to evade. This is how the situation becomes "soul size," however vast and daunting the challenges to human survival may be.

Are the Christian churches ready to meet the challenge? They have within their heritage immensely powerful ideas, not to mention a living Lord. But to a large extent the churches with strong theological traditions suffer from theological amnesia because they have either jettisoned so much or they have so isolated Christian theology within a premodern outlook that they have forgotten how to think theologically. With the demise of the modern mentality, however, there is no need to choose between jettisoning basic Christian convictions and retreating into fideism. A culture that is increas-

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 47-48.

ingly free of the assumptions of the Enlightenment view of science, religion, morality, and society is a culture that is increasingly free of assumptions that prevent one from coming to an appreciation of the intellectual strength of Christianity. A fresh evaluation of what science and philosophy today reveal about the natural world, when combined with an account of how each of us may have access to the grace of God, may persuade Christians themselves of the intellectual viability of Christianity. It must, however, not be overlooked in the accounts of what the natural world shows us and how we may have access to God's grace, that it is only when people find themselves actually receiving God's grace and interacting with God that their minds and hearts achieve the full assurance of conviction in the truth of Christianity. It takes not only thinking but also action to achieve conviction.

### III

One aspect of current intellectual culture is unfavorable to my project. As we enter a postmodern or post-Enlightenment world many people, including theologians, are becoming distressed by the plurality of worldviews. Many have been driven to relativism by the collapse of the Enlightenment's confidence in the power of reason to provide foundations for our truth-claims and to achieve finality in our search for truth in the various disciplines. Much of the distress concerning pluralism and relativism which is voiced today springs from a crisis in the secular mentality of modern Western culture, not from a crisis within Christianity itself. The Enlightenment had already discarded Christianity and left it outside the main intellectual stream. For some time Christianity has been at best a stepchild in our universities and research centers, irrelevant to their inquiries, and explicitly excluded from them in Marxist countries. But the crisis within Western culture caused by a loss of confidence in the Enlightenment's ideals—a change which enables us better to exhibit Christianity's intellectual strength—has produced an intellectual culture whose preoccupation with pluralism and relativism makes it inattentive to that exhibition. There is such a widespread acquiescence toward pluralism and relativism in the intellectual culture at large that even many church people would be startled by my claim that the ultimate reason to go to church is because Christianity is true.

There are two ways to deal with relativism. One is to examine and refute in detail all the grounds put forward for relativism in our pluralistic situation and thus to show that we can in principle succeed in our search for truth. This would show the possibility of finding truth in various domains, but it would still leave us with the task of showing the grounds for Christian



claims. Another way to proceed is actually to give a case for the truth of Christian beliefs without directly examining and refuting the various reasons people have today for becoming relativists.

I shall follow the second course because many people in Western culture continue to evaluate Christianity (and religion in general) with the assumptions of the Enlightenment. Many people both in the West and among the Western-educated in Asia and Africa still do not know of the developments in science and philosophy which render those assumptions untenable. Western culture at large is still in the process of moving away from those assumptions. As we continue to do so, the fact that there is a plurality of worldviews and religions will continue to drive some people toward relativism. But if we can exhibit the intellectual strength of Christianity, we can render a service both to those who are still captives of the assumptions of the Enlightenment and think that belief in God as Creator and Redeemer in Christ is impossible for an educated mind and to those who are free of those assumptions but are now adrift. An exhibition of its intellectual strength can enable us to live in a postmodern world and to hold Christian claims with all our heart and with our mind persuaded of their truth. My case is directed then both to those still troubled in various degrees by the assumptions of the Enlightenment and to those who are disillusioned with them, but who feel defenseless before the plurality of worldviews and religions and thus do not know how to avoid relativism.

The situation for the Christian religion is both better and worse than it is for other subjects, such as physics and mathematics. On the one hand, unlike all other attempts to determine what is true, our religion is anchored in faith. Through faith God gives access and knowledge of Godself which the study of the natural world, history, and human nature do not of themselves yield (even though significant traces of God are to be found in all of these domains).

Religion is neither a theory nor a hypothetical speculation in search of verification but actual interaction with a reality. Faith is above all to consent to the good that God has in store for us. To perceive that good and to say "yes" to it opens us to contact with God. We experience God's presence. With that relation to God we are able to recognize the traces of God in nature, history, and human experience. Neither in physics nor in mathematics, for example, are we invited to receive a good, to commit ourselves to its realization, and in that realization to find our faith confirmed. In physics and mathematics there is no possibility of knowledge through this kind of faith (even though both disciplines make assumptions and so require the exercise of some other kind of faith).

On the other hand, because Christianity is a faith, Christian claims are vulnerable. People without faith lack awareness of God and thus misunderstand the grounds for what Christians hold to be true. Because they do not have contact with God, for them faith is mere credulity. Their examination of the ground for Christian claims lacks an essential ingredient and without it they quite naturally conclude from their examination of nature, history, and human nature that Christian claims are not sufficiently warranted by the hints of God they give. A major concern of the book will be to explain the nature of faith and how it affects the way we assess the grounds for Christian claims. This explanation should benefit both believers and non-believers.

Those of us educated in a modern university—whether we are believers or nonbelievers—are prone to ignore or dismiss beliefs based on faith. We have been taught that we must not believe what is not warranted by evidence. Through the critical study of various disciplines, our minds become so shaped or formed that this injunction is internalized. We almost automatically ask of any claim, What are its grounds? How good are they? To be told that the ground for a claim is largely faith is the same as to be told that the claim is virtually groundless. To believe it would be to be guilty of credulity. Because they rely so largely on faith, educated Christians often find themselves wondering whether their commitment to the Christian faith without compelling evidence is not after all credulity.

They need to learn more about the relation of faith to evidence in Christianity. This is presented very simply but accurately by Austin Farrer.<sup>9</sup> He tells us that the notion of “God,” just like that of “mother,” is a loaded term: it contains built-in attitudes. He compares the situation of an orphan considering the possibility that his or her mother is alive to that of one considering the possibility of God.

For the child, to think of a possible mother is to experiment in having a mother; to try filial existence. The experiment takes place in the realms of the imagination, but it is real enough to the heart. And similarly to think of a possible God is to experiment in having God. The attitude of creature to Creator, of doomed mortal to immortal saviour, is built into the very idea. The heart goes out to God, even to a possible God.<sup>10</sup>

Farrer tells us that he does not know whether we should call this attitude faith because it does not represent a commitment, since we realize that the

<sup>9</sup> Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964), chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

thought of an existing God is a contested notion. He suggests that it should be called "initial faith," and he also refers to it as the "faith-attitude." Although the thought of God is a contested notion, nonetheless it is not like the figure in a dead mythology. Our minds are divided but also engaged:

I say, "There is a God," and a piece of my heart goes with it; I go on "But then . . ." and my attitude swings into the opposite. Which of my thoughts, which of my attitudes, is I, or speaks for me? It is notorious that I may be deceived in thinking myself committed in one direction, when I am really committed in another. But so long as I know very well that I am not committed, I do not think of claiming to have faith. Yet the faith-attitude is there, if it is no more than one posture among several which I try by turns. To have faith in the full sense, I do not need to bring it from somewhere else, and apply it to the idea; all I need to do is to let it have its way, and subdue its rivals.<sup>11</sup>

The way to subdue rivals is by considering nature, history, human nature, and the gospel story. But one has to *appreciate* the notion of deity if the evidence for deity is to be apprehended in nature, history, human nature, and the gospel story. "Without the readiness of [initial] faith, the evidence of God will not be accepted, or will not convince. . . . [Initial] faith is a subjective condition favourable to the reception of the evidence."<sup>12</sup>

Farrer is concerned not only with initial faith but with a full faith and, in his examination of it, he reveals another aspect of his understanding of the relation of faith to evidence. In the short essay "On Credulity"<sup>13</sup> he describes four domains that give access to four kinds of facts or truths. These differ as facts or truths only because our access to them differs. The first domain is that of specialized studies. We limit our inquiry, for example, to the measurable dimensions of physical processes or to the economic aspects of human behavior. When we do this, we recognize that we are dealing with abstractions; but the abstractions give us access to some facts.

In the second domain we deal with actual people and things. There is a difference between interacting with individual persons and dealing with the abstractions of our specializations, which study only aspects of them. All specializations taken together do not have the same impact on us or yield the same knowledge as does interacting with actual individuals.

The third and fourth domains, unlike the first two, include values and

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup> Austin M. Farrer, *Interpretation and Belief*, ed. Charles Conti (London: S.P.C.K., 1976), 1-6.

valuation. We can engage in abstract study and even interact with actual people and things without raising the question of whether the facts revealed are to be approved or deplored, or whether a person is, let us say, sincere or perverse. The domain of value is treated by a specialization: ethics. Just as in the first domain, here too we think abstractly. But by observing the limitations of abstract thinking we have access to various truths about such things as the nature of obligation and moral rules, or at least we hope to. The fourth area is religion. As in ethics, we are concerned with values and valuation, but not abstractly. We deal with our entire person interacting with real beings. If we are willing to consider Christianity, we may find that

part of our own minds [yields to] the inexorable truth that we are rebellious creatures under the eye of our Creator, and that our Creator has come upon us in Christ. Credulity, here, is the crime of pretending to believe that there is any way out of this situation but one—to reconcile ourselves to the truth of our nature, which demands our submission to the God who made us.<sup>14</sup>

Of this domain Farrer writes,

Now when the New Testament writers said that in Christ they met the truth, they meant that in him they recognized what was demanding admittance through this door [the fourth domain]. It is of no use, of course, for Christians to pretend that on this ground everybody is bound to agree with them straight away, but anyhow on this ground their position is immensely strong and they need fear no antagonist. There is no constraint, no embarrassment here; here we can take on all comers.<sup>15</sup>

Farrer is describing the effects on the individual of encountering Christ. The question is whether an individual person is willing to expose himself or herself to a self-examination in the light of what is said about Christ.

It is very easy to avoid such self-examination. All that a person needs to say is "Why should I examine myself in this light?" with the intention of evading the general category of evaluation. This question has to be answered solely in terms of truths accessible through the first and second domains. One then has excluded from consideration the very domains which give access to the discipline of ethics and the factors that move a person to love Christ and to have faith in him. But it is not difficult to specify a

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



procedure that enables one to experience the impact of Christ on oneself. Anyone can open his or her heart, just as anyone can close it.

We sometimes use the word "heart" to refer to being sensitive to another person's plight. "Have a heart!" we say when we mean, "Be merciful!" Another use of the word is found in Jesus' remark, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). This use refers to what we value and seek to possess because of the good it will do and be for us. It is related to the human quest for life. The intellect is involved in this quest but what is at stake is our own person: what we are, what we ought to be, what we may become, what we may hope for. It is this use of the term "heart" that I am employing. To open the heart is to allow what is in the domain of value to affect us. With an open heart we may find in Christ and in the promises of God the good that we need and seek. But without an open heart we shall not.

Frequently we use the intellect to solve problems or to seek knowledge without the questions of the heart arising. We quite properly exclude considerations of the heart when we deal with questions of the properties of a physical process or the economic factors in currency exchange rates (truths of the first domain). It is even quite proper to restrain, though not utterly to exclude, questions of the heart when we consider the nature of obligation or the role of moral rules (truths of the third domain). When we interact with people or things (truths of the second domain), we can and do close our hearts. Sometimes this is proper as, for example, in considering whether a person is worthy of trust. Finally, we can also quite easily avoid Christ's impact on us as judge and redeemer by keeping in check the human search for what is valuable and what gives life significance.

Belief, then, is not necessarily a result of credulity and nonbelief necessarily the result of a proper respect for the principle that evidence must warrant truth-claims. A prior question is whether our hearts are open or closed to religious matters. One whose heart is not open might agree that the existence of the universe poses a real question and that it might be a reason to say the world is created. But since it does not compel us to say that it is created, and since religion is irrelevant to scientific progress, the question of why the universe exists is dropped. Nature cannot be a witness to God's existence and goodness to a person with a closed heart. The same is true with everything that contributes to belief. To the closed heart every indication of God in nature, history, and human nature are thought to be insufficient to establish God's existence or irrelevant to scientific progress, and

Christ is not given admittance. *How we seek*—with an open or a closed heart—is crucial.

Assuming that we have not only opened our hearts to the impact of Christ but have also become Christians, we look at nature, history, and our own lives for manifestations of God because we do not want to believe what evidence does not warrant. But when we have exposed ourselves to Christ, credulity is the pretense of believing that our lives have validity without God:

Unless our minds in fact function in these two ways: unless we sometimes see God as truth, and evasion of him as credulity, at other times the proved facts of the special sciences as truth, and the outrunning of them as credulity—unless this is so, we are not confronted with the specifically religious problem of truth.<sup>16</sup>

It is because our minds function in *two* ways that a believer investigates scientific and philosophical questions that are relevant to Christian claims.

The believer also considers historical questions, since “we must have no bogus history.”<sup>17</sup> But the investigation is done in a particular way. Farrer points out that many historians limit their search to truths of the first and second domains (specialized and without the dimension of value). Such people, he says, are not going to see truths of the fourth domain breaking out through the façade of history because they have discounted them from the start.

But the historian whose mind is open to the fourth type of truth, and who has some awareness of the abyss of divine being which underlies his own existence, may meet a voice and visitant out of that abyss, when he weighs the strange history of the year 30 as it is mirrored in the witness of those who most intimately responded to it.<sup>18</sup>

In less dramatic language, a person who has exposed himself or herself to valuation by Christ and who engages in intellectual work in science, philosophy, or history with a concern for Christian truth is a person with faith seeking understanding. He or she is seeking to relate religious truths to which there is a commitment to truths in other domains. That is a form of gaining confirmation, but it is not to be understood as the search for evidence that will necessarily move anyone regardless of the condition of their heart. Yet Christian commitment is not a matter of the heart only, for a

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

commitment can be given up should the mind not be convinced of the truth of Christianity from an examination of nature, history, human nature, and the gospel.

This understanding of the relation of faith to evidence differs from the usual philosophical examination of the grounds for belief in God. Philosophers of religion (at least in the English-speaking world) examine the grounds for theism. Theism is not an actual religion but an abstraction. It is what Christians, Jews, and Muslims are said to share: belief in one God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and good. Even when they marshal a favorable case for the existence of a benevolent God, as has been attempted more frequently in recent years, there is nonetheless a gap between the case for theism and the beliefs of an actual practicing religion.<sup>19</sup> With this approach, it is easy to regard faith as filling the gap between a warranted case for theism and an unwarranted case for Christianity (or Judaism or Islam). Since belief in a benevolent God is warranted, to have faith in the specific claims of an actual religion seems a reasonable act for those who choose to exercise it.<sup>20</sup>

This interpretation of faith is analogous to a comedian's remark, "I have a marvelous gun. It shoots bullets for eight miles and throws rocks the rest of the way." In the typical examination by philosophers of religion of the grounds for religious belief, faith is a pale substitute for evidence. Examining the abstraction theism, rather than an actual religion, makes it easy to characterize faith in this way.

On Farrer's approach, faith is a response to the good promised to us by God, preeminently in Christ. In that response, we interact with God and begin to receive that good. We do not move from the evidence we can muster for theism to an actual religion by a leap of faith, understood as a substitute for evidence. On the contrary, it is with an "initial faith" or with a full faith (each of which usually develops through interaction with a believing community) that we look critically at nature, history, human nature, and Scripture. There is thus no "gap" to be closed by "faith" after we have engaged in critical study.

Faith, then, is an essential but not the only ingredient in making

<sup>19</sup> For an example of the difference between a case for theism and the attempt to provide a warrant for an actual religion see Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Not everyone who thinks that theism is warranted would agree. Gutting, for example, argues for a religious skepticism in relation to an actual religion. We can give only an interim and not a decisive assent, as he puts it, to the rich outer belt of belief associated with our own religious tradition. For a perceptive evaluation of Gutting's position, see the review by George I. Mavrodes in *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (October 1984), 440-43.

Christian claims. Reason is used, not only to examine the grounds for such claims but also to understand them better. Those with faith seek understanding. This ancient formula has been interpreted in various ways, but every interpretation has recognized that we are to relate Christian claims to our best estimate of what we believe to be true of the events of history and to the workings of nature and the human mind. It is from this interaction of "faith and knowledge," as it is called, that Christian theology as a discipline of inquiry emerged in the earliest centuries of the Christian religion. This search for understanding has sometimes led to conflicts between various formulations of Christian theology and what we believe to be true in other areas of inquiry, and it has led to mistakes as well. For example, it was once thought by some theologians that Christianity had a vital stake in the existence of innate truths. That is, they thought that Christianity was committed to the view that some general principles of logic and some moral truths are imprinted in the human mind. When John Locke in his celebrated *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) denied the existence of innate truths and claimed that all knowledge was based on experience, Bishop Stillingfleet of Banbury unleashed a series of bitter denunciations. The good bishop was apparently mistaken. Most Christians today read Locke's denial of innate truths without the slightest apprehension.

To relate our faith to knowledge always runs the risk of making mistakes, but it is necessary. Faith is a distinctive way to gain access to God, but it is not completely separable from other ways of knowing. For example, Jesus was a historical person and what he did and said is vital to us. We know enough about the transmission of historical information to know that errors can be made and that we can easily misinterpret documents from earlier periods. We thus need to know how to judge the authenticity of ancient texts and to develop principles for the interpretation of texts. So we employ various disciplines because we do not want any bogus history as part of our faith and because we want to understand the Bible better.

#### IV

For an increasing number of people today, the chief obstacle to being fully convinced of the truth of Christianity is not a scientific view of the world that has no room at all for religion but the existence of rival religions. It seems to them that because there are so many religions, it is not possible to make exclusive claims about the truth of any religion. To show the intellectual viability of Christianity vis-à-vis the residue of the Enlightenment is



not enough to satisfy their minds of its truth. It is therefore necessary to address this question.

My approach is to develop a theology in which the reality of other religions is taken into account, a Christian theology of other faiths. This differs from the discipline of history of religions, in which an understanding of a religion from the inside is sought. Such is certainly useful and necessary. But as a Christian believer one must go further and seek to learn how another religion fits into the economy of God as Christians understand God's nature and activities. A Christian theology of other faiths seeks to understand another faith from a Christian point of view.

This task cannot be completed since we do not know God's providence fully. The apostle Paul could not fully understand the role those people of Israel who did not receive Jesus as the Messiah were to play in God's providence. He believed that it would be manifest some time in the future. So too we must live with at best only partial knowledge. But if it can be shown that significant knowledge of Christ's saving work is accessible to people of various faiths or of no faith at all, we may continue firmly to believe that, on the one hand, Christ is the Savior of the world and, on the other hand, not condemn another faith or person simply because they are not explicitly or fully Christian.

## V

Because the argument will proceed in stages and cover a large diversity of material, an overview of its main stages may be useful. We shall begin with a discussion of the Enlightenment view of modern science and the way it pitted science and religion against one another. This outlook was so persuasive that the immense contribution of Christianity to the rise of modern science has only recently been realized and the picture of science and religion as essentially and intrinsically hostile to one another has been shown to be false. This residue of the Enlightenment is so strong that there is a pervasive opinion in our culture that religion is really outdated and that it hangs on merely because of ignorance, human weakness, and the need of comfort. This prejudice must be cleared away before we can consider the recent developments in philosophy and science which raise questions that point us in the direction of God. Philosophy and science today actually show us that whether the universe is dependent or not is philosophically and scientifically an open question. Our best knowledge from these two fields instead of closing off the possibility of God, as the Enlightenment thought, actually shows the possibility of God.

Once the possibility of God's existence has been raised, we may turn to our need for God, so that the question of the status of the universe is seen to be an important and even urgent human question and not a mere speculative issue.

The possibility of God and even the need for God do not of themselves produce conviction of the reality of God. But they do lead a rational person to seek God. Such a search, because it is honest, requires a consideration of the teachings of the Bible. Its meaning is opaque, however, unless we overcome the barriers to understanding which are caused by our own personality. We take it for granted that we must prepare ourselves to appreciate works of art or to do chemistry, but we all too often fail to realize that to have faith and to know God's presence also requires extensive and diligent preparation. With the proper preparation, it is possible for a person to experience divine grace and to come to faith.

The Enlightenment's failure to provide a foundation for ethics and society has left us with no way to counter the widespread attitude that values are mere expressions of personal preferences. This is in effect to deny the reality of good and evil. In our examination of the nature of faith, their reality and our need for a Redeemer will become apparent.

The nature of faith has been greatly misrepresented both by Christian theologians, especially since the Reformation, and by nonbelievers. It has frequently been put into opposition with reason, or below reason, instead of above reason. Although its truths cannot be reached by reason alone, nonetheless they illumine the intellect. Otherwise faith would be blind. A narrow view of reason and the failure to realize that faith and naked intellect belong to different contexts (or orders) are largely responsible for these misconceptions. Both the reasonableness of faith and the relation of reason to divine revelation will be described at length.

One of the most serious clashes between the modern mentality and Christianity has been over the picture presented by the Bible of God creating and sustaining the universe, and bringing about events in history and individual lives. It has frequently been said that divine agency is inconsistent with the picture of the universe and history presented by science. A careful examination shows that there is no incompatibility between divine agency and a scientific understanding of the universe.

With the recovery of some of the riches of the Christian faith, made possible by freedom from the narrow boundaries of the modern mentality, we are able to discern vital ties between Christ as the prime mediator between us and God and other religious faiths. As long as we are constrained by the

modern mentality, we will not achieve a sufficiently deep understanding of Christianity to be able to find God, as revealed in Christ, present in other religions. But God is revealed there in surprising ways. A Christian theology of other faiths will in turn increase our confidence in the truth of Christianity by bringing out features of the Christian faith which are not widely known or appreciated, especially by Christians who are confined by the modern mentality or who have returned to the shelter of a premodern mentality.

In summary, the core of my argument is (1) that the natural world's existence and order point to the possibility of God; (2) that our own needs, unless deliberately restrained, lead us to search for what is ultimate; and (3) that conviction concerning the reality of God comes from the actual experience of divine grace, frequently made possible through the witness of the Bible and a believing community, but that such experience of divine grace is usually easily overlooked.

I would not dare embark on this ambitious project were it not for a comment by Basil Mitchell. When I expressed my admiration for his book on ethics (*Morality: Religious and Secular*) he said, "I don't think of writing a book as if it were the last word on a subject. I seek only to further the discussion." It is in that spirit that this book is offered, sustained, as was Mitchell's book, by a confidence in the intellectual strength of the Christian faith.

# Josef Hromadka and the Witness of the Church in East and West Today

by CHARLES C. WEST

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## I. A New Era

LET ME BEGIN with a statement that sounds standard but is overwhelmingly true: in the year 1989 we stand on the threshold of a new era in the relation of the world's peoples to each other. A new drama, long in preparation, is beginning. The remarkable changes in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev have raised the curtain on it and we find ourselves in a new history of forces and ideas. Let me illustrate:

a. The political power balance by which we have measured everything since World War II is softening and breaking up. More than that, a new conception of the relation of power to national interest is emerging. Stockpiles of strategic weapons are still there. Military minds in the United States and the Soviet Union continue to press the logic of deterrence and security. But diplomatic initiative lies elsewhere, in radical proposals for disarmament, in a shift of emphasis from defense to industrial technology and trade, and in discreet cooperation, coping with the trouble spots of the world.

b. The ideological front is breaking up, despite the protests of hardline Marxists-Leninists on the one side and free enterprise dogmatists on the other. Marxism is open to reinterpretation and criticism in its central tenets. Socialism is being redefined. Class solidarity and revolutionary power are being called into question. All this leaves us and the rest of the world scrambling for new concepts and movements with which to deal with greedy and oppressive powers, and express human hopes for a more just and free society.

c. Economic forces at work in this world are out of control. No agency—national or international—is able to call them to account. No world planning can give them effective direction, and only the blindest dogmatists believe that world market forces will solve the problems they create. Bureaucracies are ineffective, even when backed by state power, as the breakdown of socialist economies in Eastern Europe demonstrates. But they are equally ineffective when composed of international bankers, business executives, or



U.N. officials. Meanwhile, the world debt crisis threatens catastrophe unless it is controlled. The gap between the world's rich and the world's poor grows greater, and transnational corporate entities concerned primarily with feeding themselves roam the earth like dinosaurs.

d. Our technological exploitation of God's non-human creation is out of control. In a few cases such as the international treaty limiting fluorocarbon emissions to protect the earth's ozone layer, an extreme and obvious danger has produced universal agreement. But the world's rainforests are still being destroyed. The oceans are still being overfished. Long-term changes in climate are still being produced by atmospheric pollution. We have not solved problems of toxic waste disposal. One could go on. Socialist and capitalist societies have wrestled with these problems and none has as yet controlled them. Marxists, process philosophers, technocrats and environmental idealists as well as Christian theologians, have tried to project a guiding concept of human life in balance with nature, but none has yet captured the allegiance of technological power or human ambition.

e. Meanwhile in the absence of unifying ecumenical visions of world peace and justice, plural loyalties are knitting human community together around alternative centers, and are tearing it apart. This tendency has its creative and its destructive side. Culture, community, and sense of mutual responsibility for the common good are rooted in nations with their common language, their kinships, and their sense of solidarity. Yet racism, xenophobia, imperial domination, and violent conflict are as well. What is a nation? What are its rights? And how are they related to world justice and peace? In a time when the solidarity of the oppressed poor in struggle for world liberation has proved to be a myth and when the promise of universal prosperity through the operations of a world free market system has also betrayed us, we need new visions of community, both national and ecumenical.

We are on the threshold of an era with tremendous possibilities. It is no less than earlier a time of crisis. The historical forces at work here, though otherwise deployed, are rooted in the long history of the last two centuries. We are confronted in them today, as before, with the question of the judgment and grace of God at work in human events and the calling of the church to be God's servant and witness in their midst.

## II. The Importance of Josef L. Hromadka

The year 1989 is also the 100th anniversary of the birth of one of Princeton Seminary's great theologians of the past generation, Josef L. Hromadka.

Josef Hromadka was born in the small Moravian village of Hodslavice, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in 1889. Trained as a theologian in Vienna, Basel, Heidelberg, and Aberdeen, he was ordained in 1912 and became a chaplain during World War I. When Czechoslovakia became independent after that war, he helped to create the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren and became one of its first professors of theology. Theologically close to Karl Barth, politically a socialist and a Czech nationalist, he was forced with his family to flee his country when it was invaded by the Nazis. From 1939 to 1947 he was Professor of Theology and Ethics at Princeton Seminary. Then he returned to his native country as Professor in the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague, there to play a leading and controversial role as theologian and diplomat in his own church, in the World Council of Churches, and in the Christian Peace Conference of which he was the founder. Through his friendship with Marxist leaders, he was influential in establishing the spirit of the "Prague Spring" in 1968. He died in 1969 a year after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia crushed the liberal reforms of that movement and destroyed the Marxist-Christian understanding which he had been so influential in cultivating.

Why is this man prominent as he was in his own time, so important for us today? I think for three reasons.

First, he was a leader in whom the East and the West combined. With Slavic sympathy, he experienced the drama of Russian history as his own. He probed the depths of human nature and Russian culture with Dostoevsky. He experienced the Russian Revolution as an event in the life of his world. At the same time, he was a man of Western culture, a Protestant in the tradition of the Czech Reformation, trained in Vienna, Basel, Heidelberg, and Aberdeen, steeped in the spirit of free critical inquiry, political democracy, and personal response to the word of God in the church. His mind is not a fascinating alien world to explore, as is that of Nicholas Berdyaev for example. Nor is he part of a Western world caught behind the Iron Curtain, as are many of the articulate creative theologians of the Evangelical Church in East Germany. In Hromadka, we find a man of two worlds, united in one spirit.

Second, Hromadka's theological task is also ours: to place the history of the world in the context of the word and act of God made known in the biblical story and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was a servant of the living God, a witness to the reality of God's kingdom in his situation as we are called to be in ours. Our lives are in the same context of reality known by faith. It is our worlds that differ somewhat. We can learn

from him, therefore, in a special way, different from the way we learn from our Western theologians, how to hear the word of God, how to live with Christ, how to be the church, and how to hope for the world.

Third, Hromadka has posed more sharply than any other theologian I know the question of the meaning of secular historical events in the context of the providence and the promise of God. We may or may not agree with his historical perceptions. I for one have taken sharp issue with him at times. But in all his thought and action, he was a Christian witness. Never were the judgment and grace of God absent from the events and powers of human history; never was the saving promise of God absorbed into these events. We need to learn this art from him today and practice it ourselves.

Let me say a few words more about each of these.

### III. The Crisis in East and West

Josef Hromadka was a man in whom two worlds combined. It would be more accurate to say that he was a central European who allowed all the social and cultural forces, all the historical catastrophes of his world to work within his soul. The result was a sense of reality expressed so well in the title of his first English book *Doom and Resurrection*.<sup>1</sup> It was a reality he experienced in many ways. As a Czech Protestant in the Hussite tradition, he belonged to a church that had been crushed in the 17th century, lived in persecution, flourished again in modern Europe until the new suppression under communist rule. In what reality does such a church live, hope, and bear its witness? He was also a child of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. In his autobiography he bears eloquent witness to the spiritual-psychological community which the peoples of that Empire had shared for centuries. The Empire fell and in its place the Czechoslovakian nation arose with its own spirit and its liberal democratic institutions, led and inspired by the philosophy of its president Thomas Masaryk. This nation was crushed by Hitler, betrayed by the Western powers, and when it rose again was caught in a Communist revolution. How does one make spiritual sense of such a history and how does one live responsibly and with hope in such a world?

Hromadka's response was to draw on a sense of the human drama which was profoundly Russian. Nicholas Berdyaev describes it as "maximalism," a perception of the total demand of holiness on human life and society, an impatience with skeptical criticism, relative analyses of better or worse, and the calculated contracts of bourgeois liberal society. The obverse of this spirit

<sup>1</sup> Josef L. Hromadka, *Doom and Resurrection* (Richmond: Madrus House, 1945).

is a profound sense of the demonic at work in human nature, in culture, and in politics, and of the catastrophe to which it leads. Hromadka's mentor was Dostoevsky, an intensely personal prober of the depths of human depravity, in a world without reference to eternal truth and love, and of the witness of the suffering Christ therein. Like Berdyaev, Hromadka discerned in this the pattern and fate of a whole culture, expressed finally in the victory of the Bolshevik revolution. Unlike Berdyaev, he found the same pattern in the world west of the Pripyet Marshes. His appreciation of Thomas Masaryk's understanding of the crisis of Western society as reflected in the history of Russia, and his final rejection of Masaryk's idealistic humanist religion and democratic politics, illustrate this. So does his affirmation of the early Karl Barth's theology of crisis. The message from all of them is the same. In Hromadka's own eloquent words:

The crisis of our civilization is deep, deeper than any of us are prepared to admit. The civilization as it existed prior to 1914, and, in a way, until 1930, is gone. The cathedral of common norms and ideas, standards and hopes, disintegrated from within. The present world war manifests in an unparalleled way the destruction of the (certainly imperfect yet real) unity on which the community of the civilized nations had rested . . . We are living on the ruins of the old world both morally and politically. Unless we understand this state of affairs, we cannot help groping and stumbling at noonday as in the night. All is literally at stake. No one single norm and element of our civilization can possibly be taken for granted.<sup>2</sup>

The old order is gone, destroyed by its inner moral decay and by human depravity. The bourgeois liberal order of the West is weak, self-centered and self-indulgent, without the discipline of relation to a single ultimate truth, to a united spirit, and unable to call forth the sacrifice necessary to build a new society. The Communist revolution in the Soviet Union is spreading not only in Europe but throughout the Third World driven by its humanist self-confidence, the devotion of its believers, and the power of masses of poor downtrodden humanity. Through all of this and behind it, the God of judgment and mercy, the crucified and risen Lord is at work. Before this Lord no halfway measures will work. In his words: "Once the walls between the 20th century and the days of the prophets and the apostles became transparent, once the distinction between yesterday (Abraham, the prophets, Jesus Christ) and today became impossible, the theologians of

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-19.



crisis grasped the awful 'no' between God and man, were crushed by the burden of human helplessness, and only then, in the hell of mortal fear and nakedness, on the deathline of human existence, they were overwhelmed by the divine 'yes.' "

Is the historical crisis this ultimate? Should Dostoevsky and the Russian revolution be our guides in understanding it? Has Barth's theology of crisis been drawn here into a basically Russian Orthodox apocalypticism which is contrary to its true message? Does the total surrender of the sinful self to God in faith imply the total surrender of a sinful society to the new forces of history?

All these are questions one might ask Hromadka. One can only do so honestly, however, when one has heard the challenge of his prophecy: a society does not save itself by defending itself and exalting its own fallible relative righteousness, but only by repentant openness to the transforming judgment of God on every aspect of its life.

#### IV. The Faith of the Church

Josef Hromadka was an evangelical theologian. There is a tension in his thought, I believe, between the sense of total crisis which we have just examined, and the evangelical theology, rooted in Jan Hus and the other reformers, of which he is one of the greatest 20th-century expounders. To this four points should be made.

First, in his theology of crisis the tension comes closest to being resolved. Hromadka, like Barth, clarified his awareness of the living word of God by struggling with the liberal religious thought—in his case that of Troeltsch—of his time. Barth, like Hromadka, was driven by the deepening social crisis of his time—in his case the failure of socialism and Christianity alike to transcend nationalisms of the first world war—to ask with final seriousness the question of a truth which speaks to human beings from beyond themselves. "What is going on at the precise point where the personal, vertical challenge of the living God cuts across the very existence of our personal life?" asks Hromadka interpreting Barth. "What does it mean that God, *the God*, and not our *idea* of the Prime Cause, not our *idea* of the Holy, not our better self, nor the Spirit of Nature, nor the Harmonizer of the Universe, encounters us and demands a personal inescapable life and death decision? A decision *Hic et nunc* at the present moment, a decision that cannot be shirked or delayed and postponed? These are the central questions of theology."<sup>3</sup> "Just as the word of God is an event," he wrote else-

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-92.



where, "so also theology as an action of thought, is an action of decision, extending hands, receiving gifts of grace and marching to the point of final destination."<sup>4</sup> It is the word of the living God which calls us to listen, to obey. In this revelation knowledge begins. In this reality, we live by faith and from it we understand our world. For Hromadka, like Barth, God's living word destroys every other basis of human self-justification in culture, in religion, in ideology, or in political systems. We live by grace alone.

Second, this gracious word of God is not only over us but with us in Jesus Christ. "In Jesus of Nazareth, God himself has done and does now his work of salvation."<sup>5</sup> He is the reality of our human life. He conquers the powers of darkness in the world including our own sin and therefore sets us free.

He is the final authority before whom each of us must answer for our deeds. He, the lowly, the scorned, the rejected and the damned one, has gone through death to life, through hell into the glory of God to prove that nothing was hidden from him, that he knows the human way from cradle to grave, from paradise to hell, that he knows what hunger, thirst, sin, guilt, disability and powerlessness are . . . The whole ladder of physical suffering, social injustice, moral corruption, and the violence of the powerful, was known to him . . . He knew the breadth of human life in its glory and its shame not only as an acute observer. He knows it as one who was fully part of human life, as one who took personal responsibility for it all. His glory did not begin with his resurrection and ascension. His glory, his power, his victory are clear to the eye of faith precisely in the places and moments of darkness, disability, curse and death.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the church of Jesus Christ is rooted in history, but it is the biblical history of the covenant calling of God and of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, not the history of worldly power, national aspirations, or even revolutionary movements. "The church is not at home under any political regime, nor under any social and economic order."<sup>7</sup> It lives in the world as the gathered community of those who are free to be for the world in Christ because they do not depend on human powers or worldly goods. "The church as the community of pilgrims has to be always on the way, resisting

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Theology Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Das Evangelium auf dem Wege zum Menschen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Hromadka, "The Church of the Reformation Faces Today's Challenge," in *Theology Today*, vol. vi, no. 4 (Jan. 1950), p. 449.

any danger of petrification and institutionalism.”<sup>8</sup> In its freedom from the world, it is the servant of the world, as it shares the servanthood of Christ to all who are in need while it points the world beyond itself to the justice and mercy of God. The church participates in the struggles of the world for freedom and justice, behind and in which God is also at work, but always with a message of critical prophecy and redemptive servanthood.

Fourth, the church lives in expectation of the coming of Christ into his kingdom and therefore inspires the world with an everlasting hope, always relevant to but never exhausted by human achievements. The promise of God works in the midst of historical events judging, redeeming, and transforming them. The kingdom of God transcends human achievements and infuses the world with hope despite the betrayal of its secular visions. Christians hope for the movements and peoples of the world more than they can hope for themselves, by relating them both to the judgment and to the saving grace of the triune God.

All of this is standard evangelical theology in the Reformation tradition. For Hromadka, however, it had a special meaning. It was gospel for human beings like himself and his compatriates, caught up in the despairs and the utopian visions, the sufferings and the coercive powers, which multiplied in the upheavals of his world. It meant distinguishing month by month and year by year between a human word—even a religious word—of compromise with the power of the state or of comfort for sullen opposition and withdrawal, and the word of God. It meant discovering new forms of servanthood and sacrifice in a society where bearing the name Christian was already a stigma. It meant practicing in the church both transcendence and involvement under a government which welcomed only an irrelevant form of one and a conformist form of the other. It meant counselling and inspiring with hope people caught in two forms of despair: some over the loss of the humane culture they once treasured, others over the betrayal of the revolution by its leaders. We have a great deal to learn from all of these experiences for our own Christian witness.

### V. History, Judgment, and Promise

“Looking history in the face,” or being “confronted with raw history” were among Hromadka’s favorite expressions. It was clear that for him the Bolshevik revolution in Russia was the first and remained the paradigmatic expression of this history. Looking back in old age on his reaction to that revolution in 1918, he put it this way:

<sup>8</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Theology Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 44.

Beneath all the horrors, cruelties and brutalities of the revolution and the onset of the civil war, I heard an ominous but clear cry that the division of the world into central European theocratic empires and Western liberal democracies was not the last word. There is a far deeper, an abysmal division between poor and rich, between those who have economic and financial power in their hands and those who have only empty hands or educated heads. This division pervades the whole world, characterizing both victors and vanquished. That which we call the class struggle is not just a propaganda slogan or a cheap call to action. It embraces the most serious of human problems: the fight against poverty and hunger, against the humiliation and exploitation of men and nations.<sup>9</sup>

There was no doubt in his mind that Soviet Communism with its outreach in Communist parties throughout the world was the vehicle of this struggle. "Communism is not only a doctrine, a theory or a political conviction," he wrote in 1945 to his own Czechoslovak people.

The Communism that we are speaking about today is a revolutionary historical phenomenon and a complicated trend in social life. Communism means the Soviet revolution and Soviet Russia. Communism means the workers' movement based on the Marxist program. Communism means a particular philosophy, Marxism, scientific socialism and dialectical materialism. Communism also means the Communist political parties in Russia, China, in our country and in many others. Communism is also the dynamic which is so hard to define in contemporary history, something that is in the air, something which—in human terms—feels like an uncontrollable striving to prevent the broken world from being built up on personal advantages, interests, profits and privileges, but rather on social equality, security and the collective cooperation of the masses of the people. Communism means the partly obscure, partly clear awareness that the countries and nations which bore the responsibility for the leadership and organization of the world order until 1938 are neither morally nor politically able to master the enormous international tasks after the war.<sup>10</sup>

Marxist-Leninist Communism was, for Hromadka, not primarily an ideology but a historical movement carried by disciplined, dedicated believers,

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *The Impact of History on Theology: Thoughts of a Czech Pastor* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1970), p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Looking History in the Face* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1982), pp. 31-32.

with a systematic well-balanced philosophy guiding its policies, empowered by the will and the hope of masses of people "for a social system in which all class differences would fade away, the demonic, tyrannical power of money and private property would be crushed, and all men and women would be united on the same ground of human dignity, freedom and love."<sup>11</sup> This evaluation defined the context of his ministry and determined his analysis of events, in Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe, in the East/West conflict and tension, and in the radical social and political upheavals in Africa and Asia, right up to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968. He understood the "socialism with a human face" of the Dubcek government during the 1968 Prague spring to be a natural development from necessary coercion and control to more participation and freedom, as the members of society became more mature.

After August 21 there was of course a change. Hromadka saw it as a tragic failure by the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe, to understand and trust this natural development. "What it concerns," he wrote to the working committee of the Christian Peace Conference in October, 1968, "is the question whether socialism is able to develop creatively and whether it will influence the world community, especially the young and the youngest generation by convincing ideas, moral frankness and political wisdom." As he saw it in retrospect, sterile Marxist dogmatism, administrative pressures, and pure power politics were stifling the creativity of the movement. "New socialist orders were created, the socialist house was built. However . . . we were not able to inhabit it by the socialist man." The struggle as he saw it at the end of his life would be for a democratic socialism. "For us there is no way back to bourgeois society. Our state will remain socialist in the full meaning of that word. But we desire to fill it with all the great spiritual and cultural values of freedom, equality and true humanism. This is what we are determined to do, ready for sacrifice and, if necessary, for suffering."

What in Hromadka's view is the Christian witness in the midst of this history? It takes for him three forms.

First, repentance. The church can bear no credible witness in a Marxist-Leninist society that does not begin by recognizing its failure to perceive and struggle for true humanity, its practical godlessness often proclaimed in the name of God, its identification with the privileged groups in a morally exhausted and divided old society. All of this is set forth eloquently in the

<sup>11</sup> *The Church and the International Disorder: An Ecumenical Study Prepared under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches*, vol. iv of *The Amsterdam Assembly Series* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 129.

opening pages of his tract *Gospel for Atheists*.<sup>12</sup> The Christian does not draw battle lines, even rhetorical ones, against the atheist, but with him or her hears the word of the living God, shares the service and solidarity of Christ, in the midst of human need and struggle.

Second, a search with the Marxists for an answer to the basic question, what is human and how is humanity to be served and realized? Marxists are radical humanists: one must credit them with deep and real concern for true humanity. "We have no interest in having the Communist give up his goals and plans or his view of the new society. On the contrary, we wish that he may deepen his knowledge of the laws of nature and society and seek appropriate ways to liberate humanity and build relationships without class and race differences in which self interests will no longer have a place but will be replaced by true solidarity among human beings."<sup>13</sup> Communism is, in a way, an outgrowth of Christianity. "With its philosophical and practical work and its all-embracing dynamics (it) is inconceivable in countries which have not heard the gospel of a sovereign God who comes down to the dark vale of human life, or which have no conception of the stormy desire of human beings that the external, social, economic and political structures themselves should reflect something of God's gracious justice."<sup>14</sup> In their common concern for humanity, Christian and Marxist meet each other with the question how this humanity is to be understood and served, each learning from the faith and dedication of the other.

Third, in this context, Christian witness to the Marxist occurs. There is also a call to repentance for the Communist. Beware of new wrongs, "because the wrath of the Holy Lord will also fall on you and your children if you trample wantonly and willfully on the eternally valid laws of justice and truth. Do not boast so much about your victory. Do not consider yourself greater than this: that you are the servants of the people. And above all, do not imagine that your revolution is the final stage in human history. The Lord of Hosts is also Lord over Communism and is already preparing new expressions of life, of society so that they can go far beyond even the best that Communism has to offer."<sup>15</sup>

This is the crux of Hromadka's transcendence of communist-dominated history. Marxism, however useful in its analysis of past wrongs and histori-

<sup>12</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Gospel for Atheists* (Geneva: Youth Dept. World Council of Churches and World Council of Christian Education, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *An der Schwelle des Dialogs Zwischen Christen und Marxisten* (Frankfurt am Main: Stume-Verlag, 1965), p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> J. L. Hromadka, *Looking History in the Face*, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.



cal powers, is inadequate because it tries to find the meaning of history in history. "It has no answer to the ultimate questions of human life and of the heart. Human sin and the meaning of human life go beyond economic relations. The Marxists' 'philosophical method' was adequate for them to explain the world; but in order to make the world into a new creation, they needed something which they could only find in the living tradition of the faith."<sup>16</sup> Socialism needs this dimension; the realization of it therefore goes beyond Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

## VI. Questions for Tomorrow

Many critical things have been said about this judgment of historical powers and moral forces in the history of the past 70 years. Thirty years ago I wrote about the Hromadka-John Foster Dulles confrontation at Amsterdam the following: "In the last analysis both men, the extremes of Christian pro- and anti-Communism, think in terms of a faith which is less than the Christian faith, a faith in culture, society and politics informed by a unifying religion which will meet Communism as friend or enemy on its own level. In both, the Christian remains bound not to Christ in the world but to the world of Communist power and pretension itself."<sup>17</sup>

Today I think that I was wrong about both men. Pushed by the tensions of the Cold War, each was tempted to overstate the identification of his faith with a particular set of historical powers, values, and ideas, but each finally resisted the temptation. The gospel which they both confessed bore witness to the transcending judgment and grace of God over the society in which they took responsibility as Christ's servants and witnesses.

a. They were both undialectical in their analysis, however, and here remains the problem. How does one throw oneself completely into the service of one's neighbor in the world, into the construction of a more just society informed with compassion and inspired by the hope of true community and freedom, and at the same time bear witness to the judgment of God on the inhumanities and the idolatries of that society? How does one bear faithful witness to and within historical power?

This is the first question with which I think Hromadka has left us. His own answer has been profoundly called in question by the events of the last twenty years. Few in Eastern Europe are satisfied today with his picture of Communism as a mass movement for justice, freedom, and community

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Charles C. West, *Communism and the Theologians: Study of an Encounter* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 77.

which goes through a period of coercive domination before it emerges into a true democracy. They have learned too much about the suppression of freedom and the abuse of power in the Communist movement itself. Parenthetically, it might be noted that Dulles' view of America giving moral leadership to a democratic world was similarly destroyed by the experience of the Vietnam War. Christian theology needs to make a sharper analysis of historical powers and trends than did either of these men. But most theological leaders have failed in this. Reinhold Niebuhr was more dialectical in his analysis of the power dimensions of human sinfulness in every society, but less helpful in discerning the presence of the risen Christ among the secular forces of the world. Karl Barth was clear about the prior and ultimate reality of Christ in the world but never systematic in relating that reality to historical powers. Latin American liberation theologians have discovered a new divine agent in the self-conscious struggle of the poor and oppressed for their liberation. But this, though helpful in empowering the poor, is in the long run more idealistic and less helpful than Hromadka's understanding of the judgment and grace of God behind and in human events.

How do Christians grasp the work of a just and merciful God in the midst of the political, economic, and cultural changes which are remaking our societies, among social powers that often do not understand themselves? How is power to be diagnosed and made responsible to the welfare of humanity, under the reign of Jesus Christ?

b. A second and related question concerns the Christian vision for society today. For Hromadka and for many others in Eastern Europe and throughout the world, socialism was and remains a relative, secular but real expression of this vision. As an ideal of human participatory community in which all goods are shared, all persons are equally valued and human need has priority over human greed, it seems a normal extension to society of the ethos of the Christian church. But we have watched socialist systems break down during the past few years, failing in the basic task of producing the goods and services which society needs. Meanwhile, capitalists rejoice that their purely secular theory about the laws of the free market seems to be justified by its results. Yet capitalism too, besides its injustice to the poor, faces internal crises. These crises require a degree of social control that would make a mockery of its one claimed virtue: freedom. Neither system, meanwhile, has developed an effective way of living within the limits provided by God's created world. How are justice, freedom, and ecological responsibility to be combined in a viable human society tomorrow? What is the relation of the Christian church to the common search of all humanity

for such a society in a world where most ideologies have gone bankrupt? What have we to say to each other out of capitalist or socialist experience about this question, keeping the rest of the world also in our focus?

c. A final question. What is our vision of community in a pluralistic world? For the past century at least, answers to this question have assumed *one* world. This was the message of the free market economists. Karl Marx made it a dogma. Technocratic 20th-century science and industry have reinforced it. In this picture, the world is basically composed of scientists and technologists, producers and consumers, managers and workers, all driven primarily by the desire to control the resources of the world for a better material life.

We are learning in the late 20th century that this is only part of human reality. Nations are reasserting themselves around the centers of their languages and cultures. Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union offer vivid examples. Religions, not as faiths but as communities bound together by common practices and dogmas, are both uniting and dividing various parts of the world. There is everywhere a thirst for community in a fuller and deeper sense than any ideology can provide. How does Christian faith understand human community as embodied in the church, in the town, in the culture, in the state, and in the world? We should not be complacent. We have not solved this problem in the United States of America. Perhaps we can learn from as well as contribute to the search of nations like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia for solutions to it there.

In a word, thanks in no small degree to the ministry of Josef Hromadka in his time, we are now no longer groping for mutual understanding across barriers of ideology and deeply contrasting experiences with worldly power. We are in each other's neighborhoods, just as we have always been—by faith and by God's grace in the ecumenical movement—in each other's churches. The problems of the world which we face together in faith are becoming increasingly common. In Christ we need each other more than ever to face them responsibly and with hope. This, I suggest, is our agenda in the next few years.

# Understanding J. Gresham Machen

by GEORGE MARSDEN

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I REALIZE that speaking at Princeton Theological Seminary on "Understanding J. Gresham Machen" may be like speaking to the ACLU on "Understanding J. Edgar Hoover," or to the Daughters of the Confederacy on "Understanding General Sherman," or perhaps more exactly like speaking at Westminster Theological Seminary on "Understanding Harry Emerson Fosdick." Memories are sometimes long.

When I was asked to speak here I immediately thought that Machen would be the best topic since it is a subject that we have in common. For both of us, Machen is a part of our history and has helped shape our heritage. For my part, dealing with the legacy of Machen has been a major part of my career. My father was an alumnus of this institution, but not a graduate. Although he came here as a moderate Presbyterian, he soon fell under Machen's spell and, after much agony in the summer of 1929, decided to give up the prestige of Princeton and of a lucrative position as steward at one of the eating clubs, and to follow his mentor to Westminster. So I was brought up on Machen. When Ned Stonehouse's biographical memoir appeared when I was a boy, it was read to us on Sunday afternoons. I was in fact president of the regional Machen League, the young people's organization of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In a sense, I have spent a career in trying to understand this heritage.

Princeton Seminary has not had to face this part of its heritage as directly. Since Machen left here sixty years ago, it probably has been relatively easy to dismiss him as a troublemaker and perhaps even as a crank. Nonetheless he spent a quarter of a century here as student and teacher and remains one of the best known of the Old Princeton tradition. Today many of the institutions that are Princeton's counterparts or competitors claim parts of the Machen heritage and many of your students are from traditions that have been touched by that heritage. When I wrote the history of Fuller Theological Seminary, I was impressed by how Machen had touched the lives of

almost the entire early faculty. The same would be true of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, or with any of the intellectually-oriented organizations in the evangelical network associated with Billy Graham. Francis Schaeffer also consciously promoted the Machen legacy within evangelicalism and eventually within fundamentalism. And, of course, the heritage is direct and strong in the many of the smaller Reformed groups, such as the Presbyterian Church of America.

In attempting to bring my outsider's perspective toward better understanding this aspect of the Princeton heritage, I am going to stay away from the question of adjudicating the internal rift among the faculty here, which led to Machen's exodus. Briefly, the story is that in the mid-1920s the conservative Old Princeton party still had a slim majority on the faculty. They used this to nominate Machen to move from his position in New Testament to fill an impending opening for the professorship of apologetics and ethics. The 1926 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., however, refused to confirm Machen's nomination and instead appointed a committee to investigate the acrimony among the Princeton Seminary faculty. By 1929 this investigation led to a reorganization of the governance of the seminary in a way that would wrest control from the conservatives. Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, and Oswald T. Allis of the seminary faculty then left with some younger men to found Westminster. Soon after, Machen founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in competition with the denomination's board. This led to his being defrocked from the Presbyterian ministry and the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, shortly before his sudden death at age 55.

Without attempting to adjudicate these disputes, we can try to understand Machen and why he took such an uncompromising controversialist stance. When we attempt to do so, I think we will immediately see that Machen has to be understood at a number of levels. The chief danger in historical interpretation is to reduce everything to just one of these levels.

## I

I think we can see such reductionist tendencies in each of the extremes of interpretation of Machen, those of his closest supporters and those of his strongest detractors.

Supporters of Machen tend to interpret him simply at the level of the doctrine for which he stood. This level of interpretation clearly is of immense importance. Machen stood in the Old School Old Princeton doctrinal tradition. He was heir to the tradition of Charles Hodge, Francis Patton,



and B. B. Warfield, and was in fact a protégé of the latter two. His controversialism was not unlike theirs, not unlike Hodge's in helping to excise the New School synods in 1837, not unlike Patton's as the chief complainant in the David Swing case of the 1870s, not unlike Warfield's militant opposition to Charles Briggs in the 1890s. This was a venerable heritage and Machen owned it entirely. His predecessors presumably would have done much the same.

According to this view, understanding Machen is a matter of understanding the tradition and the issues. The questions were simply matters of principle. Machen recognized that modernism had crept into the Presbyterian church. As he argued in *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), liberal theology was not merely a variation within the Christian tradition like the New School theology. It was, Machen insisted, another religion, since it proposed an entirely new view of Jesus and a scheme of salvation other than Christianity had ever taught before. Having worked to purge the denomination of liberalism, Machen became convinced that the denomination and Princeton Seminary after its reorganization were irreversibly committed to tolerance. Tolerance of modernism, Machen was convinced, was incompatible with a pure church, even if most of the tolerant people were themselves otherwise conservative. So as a man of Old School principle, having failed to purge the church, Machen felt forced to leave.

There is a good bit to be said for this view. It explains much of what happened.<sup>1</sup> What it does not explain very well is why Machen went on a course that eventually left him almost alone among his Old School contemporaries. Although a few younger people followed him, by the time he organized what became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, the path he had taken had been forsaken by some of the staunchest of his Old School allies, such as Oswald T. Allis, Samuel Craig, editor of the *Presbyterian*, and most notably, Clarence Macartney, the other major figure in the conservative efforts of the 1920s to purge the church of modernism.

The other common interpretation of Machen goes to the opposite extreme and is popular among his detractors. According to these interpreters, the "time of troubles" at Princeton Seminary and Machen's later struggles against the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. can be explained largely in terms of Machen's personality. This was one of the explanations offered at the time. When the majority of the General Assembly committee of 1926

<sup>1</sup> Darryl G. Hart argues very intelligently for this view in "'Doctoral Fundamentalism': An Intellectual Biography of J. Gresham Machen, 1881-1937," Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1988.

recommended against his promotion to the chair of apologetics and ethics, they cited among other things his "temperamental idiosyncrasies."<sup>2</sup> I am not aware that any historian has explored this theme very deeply, but I have had a number of them suggest to me that there was something peculiar about Machen. Most often mentioned are that Machen remained a bachelor and his very close relationship to his mother until her death in 1931. Neither of these traits, however, was particularly unusual in the Victorian era, which certainly set many of Machen's social standards.

More to the point is that he does seem to have had a flaring temper and a propensity to make strong remarks about individuals with whom he disagreed. I ran into one early instance from 1913 in which Machen had an intense two-hour argument with B. B. Warfield over a campus policy, after which Machen wrote to his mother that Warfield, whom he normally admired immensely, was "himself, despite some very good qualities, a very heartless, selfish, domineering sort of man."<sup>3</sup> You can imagine that, if someone says things like this about one's friends, that it might be easy to make enemies. Machen does not seem to have had a great ability to separate people from issues, and this certainly added to the tensions on the small seminary faculty. Clearly he was someone whom people either loved or hated. His students and disciples were charmed by him and always spoke of his warmth and gentlemanliness. His opponents found him impossible and it is a fair question to ask whether, despite the serious issues, things might have gone differently with a different personality involved.

So, I think each of these levels for understanding Machen has some merit and perhaps they can be balanced against each other in some way. However, I do not propose to explore them any further tonight. Rather I want to look at two other levels for understanding Machen that are less on the surface and less controversial, but which may throw light on him regardless of whether one sees him as a twentieth-century Martin Luther standing up for the faith or as a crank.

## II

What I want to explore most extensively are the philosophical assumptions that lay beneath Machen's theology and his controversialism.<sup>4</sup> Partic-

<sup>2</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), p. 389.

<sup>3</sup> J. Gresham Machen to Mary Gresham Machen, 5 Oct. 1913 and 12 Oct. 1913, Machen papers, Westminster Theological Seminary.

<sup>4</sup> The following section is a substantial revision of George M. Marsden, "J. Gresham Ma-

ularly interesting, I think, is his view of history. The problem of history has arguably been *the* twentieth-century problem. For many people, all absolutes have been dissolved in historical relativism.

Machen was acutely aware of this problem and frequently returned to the point that Christianity was a "historical" religion, that is, it was based on historical events that actually happened, or it was nothing.

This question was intensely personal to Machen and reflected his own deep intellectual crisis as a young man. Reared in rigorous Old School Presbyterianism, Machen was nonetheless educated at Johns Hopkins, the cradle of modern American academia. After completing his B.D. at Princeton, he spent 1905-06 in Germany. There he was directly exposed to the theological implications of modern historical consciousness and of higher criticism. He was especially enamored of the theology and piety of Wilhelm Herrman, with whom he studied at Marburg.

Meanwhile, his mother, an extraordinarily intelligent person herself, was writing impassioned pleas not be taken in by the new scholarship. Machen replied with very uncharacteristic indignation. His parents, he said, were asking him to believe in something without a thorough investigation of its intellectual merits. It is, he wrote "a purely *intellectual* question, a question of fact, before me of settlement. "What it demands," he said, is "a perfectly free, impartial examination. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Machen's Princeton mentor, William P. Armstrong, prevailed on Machen to return the next year as an instructor in Greek, perhaps as part of a concerted effort to rescue a young man who showed all the signs of moving toward liberal Christianity. Machen accepted, but only with the strongest protests about his unsuitability for the position. He accepted it only with the assurance from Armstrong that he would have to sign no theological pledge nor do more than "stand on the broad principles of the Reformed Theology."<sup>6</sup> To his mother he wrote that "Nobody ever started a work with more misgivings," and then, as though to say she had not won, he added, "of course intellectually I shall be living to a greater extent in Germany than I was last year."<sup>7</sup> Although Machen's firm intention had been to leave Princeton after one year to prepare for another profession,<sup>8</sup> he stayed on as an

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chen, History, and Truth," *Westminster Theological Journal* XLII:1 (Fall 1979), 157-75. Some of the sentences are the same.

<sup>5</sup> JGM to MGM, Sept. 14, 1906, quoted in Stonehouse, pp. 139-40.

<sup>6</sup> William P. Armstrong to JGM, July 14, 1906, quoted in Stonehouse, p. 133.

<sup>7</sup> JGM to MGM, September 11, 1906, quoted in Stonehouse, p. 137.

<sup>8</sup> Stonehouse, p. 145.

instructor, and after a few years was brought back safely into the Old School fold.

Nonetheless, Machen remained thoroughly committed to the project outlined in his letter to his mother from Germany, the project of proving whether Christianity was historically true. "Must we stake our salvation upon the intricacies of historical research?" he asked in his inaugural address in 1915, upon becoming an Assistant Professor in New Testament. Machen's autobiographical answer clearly was "Yes." "If the Bible *were* false, your faith would go." "The sacredness of history," he said in another place, "... does not prevent it from being history; and if it is history, it should be studied by the best historical method which can be attained."<sup>9</sup>

Machen's major scholarly works, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) and *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930) both are monuments to careful historical research and argumentation. Each attempts to demonstrate the hypothesis that the traditional supernaturalistic biblical claims better explain the evidence than do competing naturalistic accounts.

Clearly a major difference between Machen's approach and most modern historical scholarship is that Machen did not a priori rule out supernaturalistic or miraculous explanations. Rather, he started out with the hypothesis that biblical claims should be taken at face value and then argued that this hypothesis better explained the facts than any other.

Beyond that, however, was a more subtle difference between Machen and most other twentieth-century historians. This difference was that they had differing understandings of what historians did, particularly differing views of the relationships between facts and interpretation.

We can understand Machen's views better by setting them against those of almost the extreme opposite, the views of Carl Becker, who I think was the most profound spokesman for the most modern views of the era. Becker was essentially a pragmatist. He held, along with other pragmatists that our minds organize reality for our own purposes, but that we have no way of knowing whether our experiences correspond to anything outside of ourselves. "Truth" is a social construct of what works in our time and place.

In 1931 Becker delivered to the American Historical Association a very influential presidential address entitled, "Everyman His Own Historian." The starting point for his argument was that, although events in the past no

<sup>9</sup>"History and Faith," in Machen, *What is Christianity? and Other Addresses*, Ned B. Stonehouse, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 170. *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History*, W. John Cook, ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 9 (originally published as Sunday school materials ca. 1916).

doubt occurred, they now exist for us only as ideas that we hold in our memories. History then is only the *memory* of the past. It is not the past itself, which is forever gone. So the only place that George Washington exists is in our collective memories. We do not know George Washington himself, but only various *interpretations* of him that survive—his interpretations of himself, his contemporaries' interpretations, and the interpretations of later historians and others. Our views of the past, then, "will inevitably be a blend of fact and fancy." Historians then are in the business of "the keeping of the useful myths" of society. Hence, historians are dealing not so much with facts as with socially constructed interpretations. (I think you can recognize almost all the major themes of contemporary hermeneutics in Becker's 1931 address.) So, said Becker, the old idea of using scientific means to discover the fixed facts of history was an illusion. Rather, what were considered "the facts" varied with the time, the place, and the perspective of the historians. To set forth historical facts, said Becker, was not like "dumping a barrow of bricks."

Machen had an entirely different view of fact than did Becker. "There is one good thing about facts," said Machen, "they stay put." (Machen did not see himself as dumping his barrow, but otherwise, he might have affirmed just the image Becker was rejecting.) "If a thing really happened," Machen goes on, "the passage of years can never possibly make it into a thing that did not happen." Becker, on the other hand, reserved this changeless quality for the now-past *events* that presumably happened. "Facts," however, in any practical sense meant our memories of these now-inaccessible events. Not only did Becker say, "left to themselves, the facts do not speak"; he added, "left to themselves, they do not exist, not really, since for all practical purposes there is no fact until someone affirms it."<sup>10</sup> Machen said just the opposite. "The facts of the Christian religion remain facts no matter whether we cherish them or not: they are facts for God; they are facts both for angels and for demons; they are facts now, and they will remain facts beyond the end of time."<sup>11</sup>

I do not think you could find a clearer contrast between the hermeneutical views that have come to prevail in the twentieth century and those characteristic of earlier eras.

Machen even went so far as to deny the view of Becker, and of many Americans of his day, that facts (or events in Becker's sense) were properly

<sup>10</sup> Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966 [1935]), pp. 233-55.

<sup>11</sup> Machen, *What is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 249.



open to a variety of interpretations, each of which might be valid in relation to its time, place, and point of view. Machen regarded events as inherently having a fixed significance—that significance they had in the eyes of God. So in order to know a fact, we need also to discover its significance. In the case of scriptural events this significance is revealed by God himself. In any case the significance of facts is not dependent on an interpretation that we impose on it and hence subject to change. Rather, what we do in historical interpretation is to attempt to *discover* the true facts and their significance. Humans do not create meaning, they find it.

So insistent was Machen that the human mind should not *impose* its categories on reality, but rather discovers the truth that was already there, that he took exception to the modern use of the word “interpretation.” “I hesitate to use the word, ‘interpretation,’ ” he told the students at the opening exercises for Westminster Seminary in 1929; “for it is a word that has been the custodian of more nonsense, perhaps, than any other word in the English language today.”<sup>12</sup>

Machen’s philosophical and hermeneutical views may sound quaint at Princeton Seminary sixty years later; but sixty years earlier they would have sounded commonplace, not only at Princeton, but at most American academic institutions. Essentially Machen’s views reflected the teachings of Scottish Common Sense Realism, which had dominated American academic thought through the Civil War era. Machen, so far as I know, never referred to Scottish Common Sense philosophy directly, but he often appealed more generally to “common sense” in opposition to modern thought<sup>13</sup> and he certainly shared the assumptions of Scottish philosophy first introduced at Princeton by John Witherspoon.<sup>14</sup>

Common Sense Realism asserted, as indeed most people seem to believe, that the human mind is so constructed that the real world can be the direct object of our thought. In some important sense, we perceive what is actually there. Philosophers, especially since Locke, however, had interposed between us and the real world the concept of ideas. These ideas, they said, were the real objects of our thought; hence we do not know anything at a distance, but only in our minds. Thomas Reid (1710-1796), the principal formulator of Scottish Realism, responded that the doctrine of ideas would

<sup>12</sup> “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” *What is Christianity?*, p. 226. Cf. *What is Faith?*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>13</sup> See, Marsden, “J. Gresham Machen,” *WTJ* (Fall 1979), p. 165n.

<sup>14</sup> On this background see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic: 1768-1822* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

only lead to skepticism as it already had for his countryman, David Hume. Everyone in fact does believe, said Reid, that a real world exists and that we can know something about it. The only people who have ever doubted this are philosophers and lunatics. When philosophers attempt to deny such common sense beliefs, says Reid, it is like people walking on their hands. Once we stop looking at them, they get down and live like the rest of us. So Humeans duck when they go through low doorways.<sup>15</sup>

Common Sense views are relevant to our contrasting views of history. Carl Becker's view is clearly an extension of the principle of the primacy of ideas as what we know, combined with the post-Kantian belief that the mind functions to impose its categories and in some sense, then, creates reality as we can know it. Machen's views on the other hand reflect Common Sense philosophy. One of the things taught by Common Sense philosophy was that we can know something about the past just as we can know things about the present world. "That there is such a city as Rome," said Reid, "I am as certain of as any proposition of Euclid. . . ."<sup>16</sup> So with historical knowledge. Based on the right sorts of reliable evidence, we can establish probabilities as to what happened in the past. And if the evidence is good enough, we are justified in believing these facts with virtual certainty. So I can be certain that Julius Caesar lived. Such a fact is, in itself, not a matter of interpretation. Everyone already believes such views of knowledge, says Reid. Courts of law settle matters of life and death on just such evidence from reliable testimony from the past.

One can appreciate, then, why Machen, holding to this common sense view of truth, would have faced such a serious crisis in his own life when confronted with higher criticism of the Bible, and why, once having committed himself to the traditional faith, would see the historical investigation of the facts as so crucial to the defense of twentieth-century Christianity. Machen's father and maternal grandfather were lawyers and Machen took the same common-sensical view toward the issue of the truth or falsity of the historical claims of Christianity. Either traditional Christianity was true to the facts and historical investigation would confirm it, or Christianity's traditional historical claims to who Jesus was and what he had done were false. In that case one should face up to the facts and abandon the claim to be Christian. Modernist theologies, said Machen, were evading this simple

<sup>15</sup> A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford University Press, 1960), esp. pp. 11-28. Thomas Reid, "Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man" (1785), *The Works of Thomas Reid*, William Hamilton, ed., fifth ed. (Edinburgh, 1858), passim.

<sup>16</sup> Reid, "Intellectual Powers," p. 166.

common sense issue with fancy language about interpretation and the like. Hence they should be exposed for what they were—those who denied the most basic claims as to matters of historical fact that Christians in every other generation had made.

### III

I want to come back to some of the implications of this outlook. But first of all I want to introduce briefly another level for understanding Machen that is completely different, but which I think also throws some important light on his career and outlook. This level of interpretation has to do with the fact that Machen, like a number of people associated with the fundamentalist movement, was a Southerner. (For what I say here I am very largely dependent on the work of my junior colleague, Bradley Longfield, whose dissertation I directed.<sup>17</sup> Longfield's dissertation is the best thing I know of on the Presbyterian controversies since Lefferts Loetscher's *The Broadening Church*. It is to be published by Oxford University Press, probably under the title: *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*. It is built around biographical studies of the principal leaders on all sides of the controversy, and it makes some very useful suggestions on the importance of understanding Machen as a Southerner.)

J. Gresham Machen's father, Arthur Machen (1826-1915), although reared in Washington, D.C. and practicing law in Baltimore, was a Southerner by heritage and in his sympathies. During the War Between the States he declined a position as attorney general of Maryland, lest he might have to prosecute other Confederate sympathizers. In 1863 he moved to the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, a congregation of southern sympathies which joined the southern Presbyterian Church just after the war. In 1873 Arthur Machen (a bachelor until he was 47, by the way) married the considerably younger Mary Gresham.

Mary Gresham Machen was indelibly a daughter of the lost cause. Born in 1849, she grew up during the war in Macon, Georgia, where her father, John Gresham (1818-1891), was a prominent attorney and one of the staunchest of Old School Presbyterians. Mary's brother served in the Confederate army. Although Baltimore was considered the most prosperous southern city after the war, Mary Machen's heart was always in Dixie. As a matter of course, she was an active member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

<sup>17</sup> Bradley James Longfield, "The Presbyterian Controversy, 1922-1936: Christianity, Culture, and Ecclesiastical Conflict," Ph.D. dissertation, Religion, Duke University, 1988.

J. Gresham Machen shared his family's southern aristocratic sympathies throughout his life. Regarding the Confederacy, he wrote to a correspondent in 1925, that he was convinced the southern states "were acting in the plainest possible exercise of constitutional rights, and that the real revolution was entered into by those who endeavored to prevent such plainly guaranteed rights."<sup>18</sup> He also shared southern attitudes toward race, combining affirmations that blacks could represent "the best part of human nature"<sup>19</sup> with the most adamant insistence that blacks and whites should remain socially separated. In fact the matter that I mentioned earlier that he was so furious at Warfield about in 1913 was the seminary's permission to allow a black student to reside in the dormitories in which Machen had a room. (Warfield, interestingly, was a progressive on the race question, coming from the side of the Kentucky Breckinridges who supported the Union.) Machen's attitude was not unusual in the context of the day; for instance, in 1922 President Lowell of Harvard refused to let black students live in their dorms and Princeton University did not have a black graduate until 1947.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Machen's vehemence on the point illustrates his strongly southern attitudes.

Ecclesiastically, Machen did not leave the southern church for the north until 1913, when it was necessary in order for him to become an assistant professor. In the southern church, of course, Old School theology and the attendant Common Sense philosophy continued to reign long after they were put on the defensive in the North.

Machen's southern loyalties cast light on his political views, which were radically libertarian. He opposed almost any extension of state power and took stands on a variety of issues. Like most libertarians, his stances violated usual categories of liberal and conservative. For instance, he opposed child labor legislation, but also opposed prohibition. He was against national parks and even went so far as to oppose an ordinance against jaywalking in Philadelphia. On the other hand, consistent with his libertarian principles, he opposed the Lusk laws in New York state which would have required state licenses for all non-public schools, arguing that the laws' supposed usefulness for checking radicalism was misguided. Only by preserving free

<sup>18</sup> Longfield, p. 89n.

<sup>19</sup> Longfield, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 159; Marcia Graham Synott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), pp. 160-98, 218-25.



speech, he said, was there hope for the one instrument that could stop radicalism. "That instrument is reasonable persuasion."<sup>21</sup>

Machen's stance against prohibition cost him in his ecclesiastical struggles, especially in 1926 when the Presbyterian General Assembly was considering his appointment to the professorship in apologetics and ethics. At the time, support of prohibition was virtually an article of faith among both progressives and conservatives in mainline denominations, and Machen's contrary views apparently were used against him.<sup>22</sup>

When asked why as a libertarian he would not allow as much liberty in the church as he would in the state, Machen replied that the church was a voluntary organization and hence had a perfect right to insist on its own constitutional rules.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, within the context of his Old School heritage, which included a strong view of the church's authority, Machen always reserved a considerable place for the rights of the individual. In *Christianity and Liberalism* published in 1923 when it still seemed that conservatives might be a majority, Machen suggested that liberals should, in honesty, simply leave the church if they did not agree with its constitution. He regarded himself as having similar individual rights. First, he forsook Old School tradition for New School practice by establishing an independent seminary and then an Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. When he was defrocked for establishing the rival board, he felt perfectly free to leave and found his own denomination. As Bradley Longfield suggests, having been reared in a congregation which left the northern church for the southern, for Machen secession "provided not only an acceptable, but in many respects an honorable, solution to irreconcilable disagreements of principle."<sup>24</sup>

#### IV

It is easy for most of us to find elements of Machen's Common Sense philosophy and of his southernness with which we disagree. When we do so, though, I think we should be careful not to dismiss all his views just because we have identified their sources. That would be the genetic fallacy—to think you have refuted a view by finding its origins. Since all our views have origins, they all stand on equal ground in that regard.

But let me presume that most of you disagree with many stances which

<sup>21</sup> Stonehouse, p. 403. Cf. pp. 401-408.

<sup>22</sup> Stonehouse, pp. 483-84.

<sup>23</sup> Machen, *What is Christianity?* pp. 113-14.

<sup>24</sup> Longfield, p. 122.



Machen took. Nonetheless, it may still be useful to suggest a few aspects of his outlook that, even so, you may find illuminating and useful. At least I find them so.

First regarding Common Sense philosophy: as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>25</sup> I believe it led Machen to overestimate the prowess of rational argument and underestimate the importance of point of view. Nonetheless, I also think that it helped Machen recognize some trends that few other mainline Protestant thinkers seemed worried about at the time. Particularly, Machen recognized that modern hermeneutics was on a track leading toward what we have today. Some of this is, I think, fairly designated as—to use Machen's term—"nonsense." For instance, this seems to me to be a fair term for some of the radical deconstruction that is popular at my own university. As I understand it—and I suppose that I am free to interpret it any way I want—it asserts as an absolute that we can not get beyond our own interpretations and therefore there are no absolutes. Although this is a view that may be plausible if we take as given a certain view of the universe, it seems to me incompatible with anything like a traditional Christian view. Much as I, as a twentieth-century historian, appreciate the importance of the many lenses through which we view reality, as a Christian I think it is necessary to build our accounts of reality around premises that include the affirmation that God has created both our minds and the rest of the world. That starting point has important implications for our epistemology. Furthermore, it seems to me non-negotiable for Christians to believe that God has revealed himself historically, especially in the Incarnation, and hence we must be able to learn something about reality through history and texts outside of ourselves. I have also discussed these ideas elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

If Common Sense philosophy, early nineteenth-century American academics, and people like Machen went too far in one extreme on such issues, popular academic opinion today, it seems to me, has gone too far to the other extreme. Machen can remind us that it might not be a bad idea for Christians to stop trying to suit current academic fads and to see if there is anything that distinguishes their philosophical outlook basically from prevailing modern ones.

Finally, Machen as a Southerner may have something to offer us. (Although I currently live in the South, I think I am indelibly a Yankee.) As a

<sup>25</sup> Marsden, "J. Gresham Machen," WTJ (Fall 1979), pp. 157-75.

<sup>26</sup> I have discussed these points further in "The Spiritual Vision of History," in C. T. McIntire and Ronald A. Wells, eds., *History and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981) and in "Evangelicals, History, and Modernity," in George Marsden, ed., *Evangelical and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984).

Southerner Machen was an outsider to the mainline Protestant establishment and hence may again have been alert to important trends that others were not seeing. Particularly, I think we can see these insights in a convocation address he gave here in 1912, later published as "Christianity and Culture." In it, Machen emphasized the importance of the intellectual task in the confrontation of Christianity and modern culture. Probably he overestimated the degree to which the task of the church in the twentieth century should be an intellectual one. On the other hand, I am convinced that he was right that many of his Christian contemporaries were underestimating the intellectual crisis which they faced. Reflecting his own intense personal tensions when studying in the advanced intellectual atmosphere of Germany, Machen was acutely sensitive to the way prevailing academic opinion could undermine Christianity. "We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer," he declared in his 1912 address, "and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion." In Machen's view, academic debates ultimately had profound practical consequences. "What is to-day matter of academic speculation, begins to-morrow to move armies and pull down empires."<sup>27</sup>

This insight—which I think is a profound one—does not seem to have been compelling to many American Protestant leaders, either liberal, moderate or conservative in the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, just at the time when Machen spoke, the American Protestant establishment was in the process of abandoning almost all the distinctly Christian elements of the vast network of universities it controlled. There were many reasons—some of them good—for this secularization of American universities, a subject on which I am now engaged on a major study. Nonetheless, the outcome, which we can see today in which mainline Protestants have almost nothing to show in the field of higher education, is one that is, at least, puzzling—especially given the long tradition of Protestant involvement in higher education.

Machen, in part because he was an outsider and one trained in Common Sense categories, attempted to sound an alarm about this trend that few of his peers were prepared to hear.

In some areas, at least, then, perhaps we might view Machen's role as

<sup>27</sup> J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913), p. 7.

analogous to that of some other outsiders of the era who because of their distinctive experience saw things in ways that others did not. Perhaps some of the southern literary figures of the era are analogous. Or in the field of American religion, the closest counterparts may be the Niebuhr brothers, who in part because they were reared in the German-speaking Evangelical Synod were alert to issues of Christianity and culture that persons raised within the establishment were less likely to see.

J. Gresham Machen—especially as a Common Sense theologian and as a Southerner—was in some ways a period piece. Not only that, he was a somewhat cantankerous period piece. He had a personality that only his good friends found appealing and he stood for a narrow Old School confessionalism and exclusivism that many people today find appalling.

Nonetheless, despite all these features which might tempt us to dismiss him, I think we are all now at sufficient distance from him to see that here also was a deeply committed Christian of great insight. Much of what he said about liberal Christianity and of the dangers of accommodation to the standards of twentieth-century liberal culture anticipated the neo-orthodox critique of the same things. Or, more precisely, they paralleled the Barthian critique which appeared at almost the same moment, just after World War I. In fact, though neither would have appreciated the comparison, there are some striking parallels between Machen and Barth. The most striking is that they each were thoroughly captivated for a time by the personality, piety and theological power of Wilhelm Herrmann, with whom they studied just two years apart.<sup>28</sup> Later they each turned from Herrmann in differing degrees. Nonetheless, despite the obvious vast differences, there were also some parallel insights they offered in their assessments of liberal theology and liberal culture. Perhaps the chief reason for these parallels was that each subjected twentieth-century modernism to the light of scripture and found modernism wanting. Not all of you will appreciate the reasons for Machen's rigorous biblicism; but one result was that it got him and many of his heirs to a critical theological stance that at least resembled what many latter-day Princetonians have appreciated from other sources.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Barth said "Herrmann was *the* theological teacher of my student years." Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, John Bowden, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Since writing this article, I have become aware of a remarkable unpublished 1928 address by Machen on Barth. In it Machen sympathetically points out the parallels between Barth's thought and his own, but cautions that Barth's epistemology and view of scripture may lead to subjectivism. Machen's address, "Karl Barth and 'The Theology of Crisis,'" with an introduction by Darryl G. Hart, will be published in the next year in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.

# The Gospel is Not for Sale: Mission Parameters and Dynamics

by RAYMUND FUNG

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OUR COMMON INTEREST this week is Christian mission. My task is to share my study of Scripture and my reflection of what I have learned about mission involvement with you. Let me first describe the approach I have decided to adopt. I attempt to understand Scripture in the light of human perception, including that of the early church and of the contemporary world. And I attempt to have Scripture illuminate human experience, thus directing and transforming human experience. In other words, I would like to engage Scripture in a dialogue with the concerns of mission today. This approach is probably often associated with Paul Tillich's methodology of correlation. But this way of reading the Bible is really common practice among many Christians today who have never heard of Paul Tillich. Certainly this is the case with basic Christian communities in many parts of the world. To have Scripture and human perception interact is not to give human experience the status of Scripture. It does mean that human experience has the right to pose questions to Scripture. The questions posed by human experience may be good questions or bad questions. And whether good answers can be forthcoming depends on the quality of the dialogue—our intellectual grasp of Scripture, our responsiveness to the Spirit, and the depth of human experience we are prepared to open ourselves to. Please permit me to give a personal testimony as an illustration of this methodology.

Before I was called to Geneva to serve as WCC's Secretary for Evangelism, I had been working in my home town of Hong Kong for 15 years in industrial mission. Throughout my Christian years (I was converted as an undergraduate) there was a part of the Christian faith, and a rather important part, that I had difficulty with. I found difficulty with the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Not necessarily in an intellectual way. I just found it difficult to pray for Jesus' return. I was engaged in industrial



mission, working with blue-collar workers, who in my part of the world were the poor. One day, an industrial accident occurred at a construction site. The cable of a delivery elevator suddenly broke. There were six workers inside. They plunged to their death from a height of 60 meters. One of the six was a Christian. So when the labor union arranged a funeral ceremony, the pastor of this man was invited to say a few words. There must have been some four hundred workers and labor union people there. I, and a few construction workers who had recently become Christians, were among them. The chairman of the union spoke first, pledging the union to fight for compensation, for better safety laws. He urged the relatives to live on bravely. Then it was the pastor's turn to speak. He spoke for about 15 minutes. He was preaching on the wide road which leads to damnation and the narrow gate which leads to God. I sensed the anger of the Christian workers beside me. They were seething in frustration and agitation. At a moment when Christian witness is best expressed through solidarity with those in grief, the pastor chose to emphasize the gap between the Christian and the community. Finally, the ceremony was over. We got out onto the streets. One of my Christian worker friends was already exploding. He shouted out loud, "I wish Jesus would have been there to speak for himself." At that moment, it came with absolute clarity to me that I had the exegesis to Revelation 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus. Come." Henceforth, I can pray this prayer in the Bible with a certain degree of authenticity and urgency. "Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come speak for yourself. Come show your face. We Christians have made a mess representing you on this earth of yours." Later on, I went back to my Bible and my exegetical work on the epilogue of Revelation 22. And sure enough, that understanding is all there. I said to myself, I could have arrived at the same exegetical conclusion by solid library work. I did not really need this encounter to know. But of course, I did need it.

With this as introduction, I turn now to my theme—the gospel is not for sale: mission parameters and dynamics.

## I

I would like to start by suggesting that the Christian Church does not have a free hand with mission. Christ has given us a go-ahead for mission. He has also given us certain parameters. Before Jesus began his public ministry, he spent forty days in the wilderness, struggling with what that ministry was going to be, and how it was to be carried out. What came out are certain parameters for mission, his and ours. We know that Jesus turned



water into wine and that he fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fishes. Yet, in the wilderness he refused to turn stone into bread as a characteristic of his mission. We also know that Jesus once walked on water. But he would not jump to safety from a high place in order to offer a spectacular demonstration of his mission. In order to draw the world to himself, Jesus did bow his head. But only on the cross, not in front of the offerings of power and wealth. Today, we may not find it easy to contextualize these parameters. But that there are parameters for mission is something the churches must recognize. The World Council of Churches, for instance, in a statement which gives title to this series of lectures, "Mission in Christ's Way," has this to say about mission parameters:

An imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to him. Churches are free to choose the ways they consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But these options are never neutral. Every methodology illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce. In all communications of the Gospel, power must be subordinate to love (Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism, WCC, 1983).

Within the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization, the question whether the evangelistic crusade is, or should be, the mainstream form of Christian mission remains also a highly controversial topic of debate. There are parameters for Christian mission. There is such a thing as mission in Christ's way.

To begin exploration of mission in Christ's way, I would like to suggest that there are two dynamics for mission. One is the familiar dynamic of going or "reaching out." Whether the content emphasis is one of proclaiming with words or involvement in social action, the dynamic of reaching out remains the same. The other is the dynamic of waiting. It is something Christians often experience but seldom articulate. Broadly speaking in mission history, we can say that the mission dynamic of reaching out is very much a Protestant characteristic, whereas that of waiting an Orthodox characteristic. Luke 15 very sharply describes the two. The chapter consists of three parables of Jesus. The first two are the parables of the lost sheep and of the lost coin. Something has been lost. Someone goes out on a search. It is found, and there is much rejoicing. The parables tell of the dynamic of reaching out. With the third parable, that of the lost son, a different dynamic is at work. A young man has been lost from the family. The father

does not go. He waits. But the result is the same. The son returns and there is much rejoicing.

In the church's mission enterprise, "going" or "outreach" is a recognized dynamic. "Waiting" is not. But "waiting" does not mean negativity. It does not mean sitting on one's hands. The waiting that we find in the third parable of Luke 15 is powerful, active waiting. We are all familiar with the story. Here is a young man in the height of his powers who decided to collect his share of the estate and be on his own. He turned away from home and began to serve mammon in a new situation. Finally, he came face to face with the falsity of his new god. It no longer satisfied. He wanted to return. And in his disillusionment, he was prepared for total submission. He asked to be accepted as servant in his father's house.

The obedient, long-suffering and righteous elder son, who has not left home, who has served faithfully his father's household, is prepared to accept his brother home on the latter's own terms as a servant. "You can be part of the household, indeed you are welcome if you follow our rules." There is no question about it. But just as surely this would have resulted in the younger son leaving home again in the end.

The good news is that this is not the father's way. He has been waiting for his son's return. He sees his son coming a long way off. He takes a step. He runs. He embraces. He accepts the disillusioned young man back into the household as a son, not as a servant.

Let us take a closer look at the father, who he is and what he does. He rejects the overtures of both his sons. He rejects the self-righteousness, however justified, of his elder son. No less, he rejects the total surrender, however justified, of his younger son. He states his condition openly in no uncertain terms, "This young man does not come home as a servant. He can only come home as a son, with all the privileges and duties, all the freedoms and accountabilities, all the comforts and all the toil."

That the father can say this, or that he is in a position to communicate this message, and indeed that his lost son can find the courage to come back to him in the first place, must be due, I suspect, to the transparency of his hope. He did not go out in search of his son to induce his return by whatever means. But neither was he resigned to the loss. Jesus described him as waiting in compassion, ready to act at a moment's notice, ready to see the signs at a distance, to run, to embrace. This is not passivity. This is active waiting, the kind of posture which communicates not so much expectations directed at the conversion of another person, as a buoyant expectancy that God will do wonders and one is ready to play one's part. Or like somebody standing

on tiptoe, longing to get a glimpse of the beautiful scenery beyond the hedges, drawing others to the spot, sparking off opportunities for sharing.

This then is the much neglected mission dynamic of active waiting. The dynamic is not so much the church reaching out. The dynamic is men and women seeking to return to God. And the church evangelizes not so much by humbly serving the world in the latter's own felt needs, or by confidently offering the promises of power and security, as by a compassionate openness to the search for God of men and women, an openness made transparently inviting by active waiting and buoyant expectancy.

Waiting can be an active dynamic, missionary in nature and in effect when it consists of three elements:

1. The waiting recognizes that before people act, God has already acted. Unless the Holy Spirit moves, all human endeavors are in vain.

2. With this conviction of "*missio Dei*," we can begin to discern the signs of God working in the human heart. Not all the signs are necessarily "religious" in outlook yet they are no less the signs of the workings of the Holy Spirit.

3. Having discerned the signs, the Christian struggles to bring out the one word which addresses the specific human condition. We do not always succeed in finding and expressing that word, but the comforting thought is that the very struggle to bring out the word communicates just as powerfully.

This is the waiting of the father in the parable of the lost son. Such waiting is evangelistic. It communicates with power and with love.

## II

The mission dynamics of reaching out and of active waiting, and the domination of the former, is paralleled by two of the most important biblical texts for Christian mission. I refer to the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and the New Command of John 13-17.

Matthew 28 is familiar territory, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you . . ." The Great Commission is literally the foundation text for Protestant mission efforts. It authorizes the dynamic of reaching out.

The New Command of John 13-17 is also familiar territory, but very seldom read as a missionary text. But it is very much a missionary text. Jesus' parting words to his disciples are: "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All people will

know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). And then Jesus interceded with his Father for his disciples that they be one "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

Here, in both verses, Jesus made it absolutely clear that Christians loving one another in unity is capable of proving to the world the divine nature of Christian fellowship and the deity of Jesus Christ. Here we have, from the point of view of the world, the mission dynamic of waiting.

The New Command is a missionary command. The command to love one another is not a domestic policy of the church. It is its foreign policy. It is, if we like, a missionary strategy, although the word strategy is clearly inadequate.

As it is, the New Command should be seen in conjunction with the Great Commission of Matthew 28. My question is, why is it that for the missionary movement, whether overseas or mission work at home, why is it that the Great Commission has become literally the foundation text, while the New Command, which is no less missionary, has been practically ignored as a missionary text? A possible answer, it seems to me, is that it is much easier for a person who is outgoing, or an extrovert, with an aggressive personality, with power and wealth, to identify with and respond to the Great Commission, with all its emphasis on authority, on reaching out to the ends of the earth, than it is for the same person to respond to the New Command, with its emphasis on loving, sharing burdens and laying down one's life for others. The Great Commission can easily be made into a mere extension of an imperialistic personality and an imperialistic culture. Both the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and the New Command of John 13-17 are mandates for mission. They are both strategies. The two should be made to interact and influence each other. For too long mission theology and practice has been designed by people who are naturally outgoing, who love to spread their wings to the end of the earth, who feel at home in the corridors of power, people who happen to have hard currency. The New Command should be given its due prominence in mission thinking today.

### III

At this point in word mission thinking, the question of power needs to be faced. Let me now share with you a more or less historical framework, a reading of world mission history which has been a challenge and an encouragement to me and to many others who are committed to the global mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. There have been marked periods in church history when the church suddenly grew tremendously and in the process experienced profound changes. I think we are on the verge of



another such period. Let me put it this way. As a result of the Council of Jerusalem reported in Acts 15, the door of the church was thrown open to the Gentiles. From then on, a Gentile person can be a believer without going through the laws of Moses. As a result, the church grew, in number and in understanding. Christianity ceased to be only a Jewish cult. It took upon the dimensions of a world faith. But to do that, the power of Jewish Christians over the church had to be broken, and Gentile believers allowed their full participation, not only in terms of participation in the life and government of the church, but more importantly, their particular Gentile perspective on theology be given due place and respect.

With the modern missionary movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries and despite its connection with imperialism and colonialism, autonomous churches eventually came into being in every land. The door of the church was thrown open to Asians, Africans, and many others. The church grew in number and in understanding. As a result, Christianity ceased to be merely the white men's religion. It has become truly a universal faith. But to do that, the power of white Christians over the world church has to be broken, and believers from other races and other cultures allowed their full participation in the Body of Christ.

Some of us feel, even now, that the door of the church is not yet open enough to people of other races and other cultures. European contextualization of theology is still regarded as normative. The parameter of "legitimate" theologizing and church involvement is still largely determined by white cultural values and categories. Some of us feel that the inability, or the reluctance, of the Christian church to appropriate the diversity of cultural insights, and the abundant gifts of many peoples, is a hindrance to efforts at world evangelism. Much remains to be done. Nevertheless, we must rejoice that the basic step has been taken, the direction set. We must rejoice that the Christian church, as a result of the missionary movement of the last centuries, is now a church of all peoples from different races and cultures.

One wonders who would come into the church next. Who will be coming into the church in large numbers, and becoming part of it, making the church even more universal, more abundant, and more approximating to the image of the world's nations bringing their gifts to the throne of the Lamb? From what I have learned of the world mission situation, I think there is every good evidence to believe that the people who will next come flowing into the Christian church are the world's poor, the poor of the earth—peasants and labourers and their families who live in slums and work in the fields or along assembly lines.



During the last decade or so, we have seen an increasing influx of these people into the churches in Latin America, in Africa, and to a lesser extent, but still in large numbers, in Asia. In the west, churches among the recent immigrant population have been the fastest growing. The trend continues today. Worldwide, masses of the poor are turning to faith in Jesus Christ. It follows then that for this process to continue, to mature and to bear fruit, the power that middle-class Christians have over the church has to be broken in the first world, but no less urgently in the third world. For while many third world churches consist mostly of poor people in their congregations, the theological understanding and mission agenda of these same churches often reflect the middle-class perspective of their leadership, with very little participation from the poor. Unless middle-class dominance of the world church is broken, the masses of the poor who are outside will not want to come in.

Here I must pause to make a couple of footnotes. When I use the term "middle-class," I do not use it in any derogatory manner. For the purpose of this discussion, the term connotes no negative meaning. There is nothing wrong with being middle-class. The problem begins when the middle-class, which constitutes only one part of the total sociological make-up of the world church, claims and exercises total power over the church and deprives all others of the openness to participate. Then everybody suffers, especially the church's understanding of the gospel and hence its credibility as an evangelist.

The other footnote has to do with the argument that for world evangelization to succeed, the power presently dominating the church has to be broken. "To break" is not the same as "to repudiate." The Council of Jerusalem did not repudiate the early Jewish Christians. It recognized the limited applicability of their convictions and their practices. Neither did the coming into being of national autonomous churches in the third world repudiate the white missionary churches. The new churches simply claimed the protagonist role in the mission drama among their own peoples in their own lands. So too, the breaking of the power that middle-class Christians hold over the church is no necessary repudiation of the middle-class. It is a necessary move for the sake of world mission, for the sake that many more may come to know Jesus.

#### IV

It seems to me that world evangelization requires the evangelization of the poor who make up the bulk of the human population and who are

outside of the church. It also seems to me that the renewal of the churches requires the full participation of the masses of the poor whose experience has until recently been very much excluded from the church's theology and mission agenda. But the poor, given the nakedness of their situation, have a lot to tell us about God, about the Bible, about the church and its mission. I am not romanticizing the poor. The voice of the poor is not the voice of God. However, theirs is the voice that God hears, theirs is a cry that God listens to. The poor are the recipients of the good news as well as its messengers.

What is the message the poor have for the church today? I think the message is that you and I are also the poor. With all our relative affluence, our relative comfort and security, we too are the hurt. And here the poor are right. Beneath our sociological reality is the deeper theological and human reality of being bound, and being hurt. I am aware that this is a very dangerous message for global mission. I am aware that this message may drive us to self-pity. It may tempt us to self-righteous unconcern and provincialism. On the other hand, it may provide a new and powerful surge for mission once more as we find within our own lives, as we find within the history of our church and our people, the experience of hurt which binds us to our neighbours and to the suffering people all over the world.

In the final analysis, an awesome and awful thought remains: only the poor and those who know that they are poor can inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who are not poor must somehow come to a realization of their own poverty. The Bible is clear on who the poor are. The poor are those on whose behalf God intervened in Egypt. The poor are those on whose behalf Amos, Micah, Isaiah and innumerable prophets have spoken out. One may say that the poor in the first place are the wretched of the earth: those who have no wealth, no power, no influence, no prestige; those who have no one except God. This is the essential basic meaning of the *anawim* in biblical history. But then, from this basic meaning came another perspective according to which the poor are those who rely on God alone, who have no one else to lean upon. In their powerlessness, they turn to God who alone is their support and stay. This is the meaning of the poor. And it is to them that the gospel is proclaimed and the gate of heaven opened.

The Beatitudes which begin with this reference to the poor are not a factual description of the poor people around Jesus. They were a capricious lot. Neither are the Beatitudes a code of moral conduct for Jesus' followers. The Beatitudes are a declaration of Jesus that those who are poor (according to Luke) and those who are poor in spirit (according to Matthew) are people

he would regard as important. Their experience and their aspirations provide the substance his theology is made of. Their questions and concerns form the agenda of Jesus' mission. There is no romanticizing of the poor. There is no masochistic embrace of poverty. Simply a clear affirmation that the poor and those who know that their lives are poor are important people in his kingdom, in direct contradiction with the value system of his day. The poor and the poor in spirit define the parameters and dynamics of mission.

With this observation, I wish to close this lecture. A preliminary conclusion lies, as I see it, in the first phrase of my title. The gospel is not for sale. The gospel is not for sale, not because it is not worth anything, but because it is too precious. It is so precious that it cannot be bought or sold. It can only be shared freely.

# So, We Are Called?

by EUGENE G. TURNER

*A graduate of Knoxville College and Pittsburgh Seminary, Eugene G. Turner is Synod Executive of the Synod of the Northeast, the Presbyterian Church (USA). This sermon was preached at the Seminary's Convocation Service on September 24, 1989.*

Text: *"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven."* (Matt. 5:11-12a.)

PRESIDENT GILLESPIE, faculty and students of Princeton Theological Seminary, I greet you as brothers and sisters in Christ, and I bring you the warm blessing of the Synod of the Northeast for a healthy and challenging academic year.

I have chosen the text and the topic for this evening because of the challenge they present to all ministers of the Word. They especially ask hard questions of the person aspiring to the ministry. If there is undue romanticism about our calling, I wish to release some of the air in the romantic balloon, without totally deflating it. Our text prompts reflection on the nature of the ministry and on the person who practices it in today's world.

I have just returned from my first visit to the Middle East, Israel, and Palestine. While the Sea of Galilee remains a beautiful place, it has changed much since the first century. I expected a serene setting reminiscent of early church times, and indeed one is still able to imagine thousands coming to hear Jesus preach on the banks of the sea. For all the changes it has undergone, there is something mysterious about this place. Echoes of Jesus' words spring forth—this evening's text being one: "Blessed are you when people revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice, your reward will be great in heaven."

The Sermon on the Mount is a kind of barometer of Christian faithfulness. Yet its instruction strikes most people today as a bit weird. The poor are called blessed. The mark of Christian maturity is meekness. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. Those who seek peace become sons and daughters of God. And most startling of all: when people persecute you and heap evil against you and lie about you because you are a follower of Christ, rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven.

Have you known anyone who has followed this Christian way of life and been persecuted as a result? The message of the Sermon on the Mount seems far removed from our experience of ministry. Most of us spend a lifetime trying to avoid the encounters and experiences that it describes.

## So, We Are Called to What Kind of Ministry?

Christian values are conveyed in the Sermon on the Mount that I don't find many people seeking today. I don't find many meek and peace-seeking people. Although the moral precepts embodied in the message are for all times, it seems we have created new ones for today. Anything goes to reach the top. We operate with the principle that peace in the world comes when there is power to enforce it.

As ministers of the Word, it is a tremendous challenge to instill the teachings of Christ in the life and work of the church. The people of God expect you to live according to these precepts and values embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. If you don't, you will be quickly "messed with," to use the idiom of today. Christ is not addressing his first disciples alone. He is speaking to discipleship for all in the church. Leading people toward Christian commitment of the quality suggested in these words is part of the challenge of the ministry today.

There are two persons who lived during our time who were profoundly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount—Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. One was a Hindu and the other a Christian, influenced by a Hindu. So, it is possible to live according to the Christian values of which Jesus spoke.

Ministry today seeks success as defined by secular forces of the world. Relating to the church is often casual, but to be a committed servant is less prevalent. The current young adult generation, known as the "Baby Boomers," views personal gratification and economic success as the benchmarks of being fully human. We who are older taught them to think this way.

Presbyterians number three million members. When a study of Presbyterians in the nation's population was conducted, six million were found. Who are the extra three million? They are Presbyterians whom we have told that discipleship is little more than a promise of faith and the identification of a denomination with which to lodge the claim.

I have a secret for you who seek to be a minister of the Word: the people whom you will serve are just slightly more understanding of their call.

Go down to Philadelphia or up to New York City. Go into midtown. Listen to some of the sidewalk preachers, not for style, but for dynamics. I heard a young guy preaching on the Sermon on the Mount. Counting me, there were two persons listening to him. Thousands passed by. You know, this guy sounded weird. Who needs this message? Who believes these are marks of Christian commitment? You are saying, "I know how to do it.



Things will be different." Yes, they will. It's going to be increasingly difficult to communicate the gospel in this secular world of ours. So, we are called to ministry?

### So, We Are Called to Minister in What Kind of World?

It is trite to say this is a mobile world. Because people and corporations are able to move from one place to another, it is quite common to see families existing in two or three locations. The most extreme case I have known is a man who works in London and lives in Northern Jersey. His wife manages a family business in Chicago. Today it is quite common to find families living in one city and working in another. A huge percentage of the people of the West and Japan move from one continent to another. This is people mobility. What is the implication for ministry?

We in the West will not continue to enjoy wealth if we ignore the poverty and suffering of a major portion of the world. Ministry will shift so that brothers and sisters of different nations on different continents will serve together in ways we cannot clearly envision today. For years we have ignored the poor and suffering of this land, and they are powerless to address it. Poor in other lands continue to point the finger at the West, and at the USA in particular. How is ministry to address this problem? Roll over and forget it, or confront people and nations with a different sense of discipleship?

Since the Middle Ages, ministry has focused on a family of wife, husband, and children. Jesus spoke to persons and reached out to persons. We need to reclaim his plan for our time. The concept of family is changing in our society. We all live in some sort of family. Husband, wife, and children are a family. People of the same sex form families. Men and women form families without the blessing of marriage. Family members live in different cities, states, and nations, and they see themselves as family. The world is changing, and ministry must change in response to it.

The most challenging change confronting mainline protestantism is the profile of the peoples whom God calls the church to serve. It is folly to assume any church is called to minister to one racial group. Christ's ministry begs for inclusion, not separation. In North American culture we are still nursing the illusion that the ministry of Christ is divided racially, economically, and socially. The future of this illusion is not promising. The demographics of our culture are changing. We will need to become far more inclusive in our understanding of the identity of God's people.

## So, We Are Called to Minister in What Kind of Church?

The church of Jesus is a group of faithful people seeking to share the love and grace of God in the world. In this community we work out our understanding of God's salvation. The Word is proclaimed, the sacraments are administered, and the people are led into discipleship.

As we view ministry today in relation to the future, there are changes occurring about which we don't talk enough. What kind of church will we have in the future? Present trends state that, in the Presbyterian tradition at least, we will have smaller congregations on the average and far fewer large ones. The small church is a viable instrument for working out our understanding of God's salvation because we know that God's Spirit is strong in these churches and discipleship shows boldness.

As ministers of the Word we need to come to grips with the reality that "success" in the ministry for most of us will be measured in some form other than becoming pastor of a "large church." This is a multifaceted problem compounded by the economic issues of living and serving in the United States. Americans value things, and it takes money to buy things. We know that one earns less when serving in the small church. So, you are called to ministry? The small church is a real force in the practice of ministry today.

On the other hand, in the future there will be fewer large churches, but those remaining may be larger. Many people want a "large church experience" and the programming it offers, and they will seek it. This will be especially true in urban and suburban communities. The churches that cannot make all the transitions of ministering to all people and providing the programs needed will suffocate.

I believe we will find a more faithful people in the church in the future. Clearly, one need not belong to the church to be socially acceptable today; therefore, it is reasonable to assume those who remain in the church will do so out of commitment to Christ and to the world for which he lived, died, and rose again.

## So, We Are Called to Minister to What Kind of People?

When I lived and worked in California, I thought leisure had replaced God as the center of life. Now I find it necessary to conclude church and leisure will continue to compete. People are looking for relaxation and escape. Sunday morning is available, so it is selected for leisure more than for the worship of God. This will not change. Learning to cope with this is

necessary to avoid depression early in the ministry. The preacher is not always the reason people stay away from worship.

Because of the demand for leisure in our culture, we will find more people who want to be Christians for the occasion—a baptism, a wedding, a funeral. These occasions are opportunities to bear witness to persons whom you may never see otherwise; therefore, be diligent and courageous in serving.

The future church will be comprised of a racially pluralistic membership. Black as well as white churches will do well to seek plans for integrating diverse cultural styles in their worship. The traditionally African-American church needs to ask how long Blacks will commute back to city churches. Predominantly white churches need to ask how to relate to the poor and the racial minority members of the community they seek to serve without patronizing them. Often, white pastors will indicate they have x number of racial ethnic members—to claim legitimacy, I suppose. Such a view of ministry to people is more social dressing than an affirmation of the gospel we preach.

The suffering poor are among us—in the USA and all around the world. How do you relate a middle-class people and a middle-class church to the poor? This is not an idle question because if you observe carefully, the church—black and white—is more and more distancing itself from the poor. Christ's ministry, as you well know, favored the poor. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "Give up what you have and share it with the poor."

Ours is a ministry to people like us. One of the reasons the mainline churches are declining in membership is that the poor are not with us. Based on our social behavior and the economic conditions of a growing poor constituency in our country, we have come to a serious dilemma.

The opportunities for membership growth in the population are among those with whom we have little, if any, contact—the poor. The middle-class people with whom we are in contact don't want to claim the church as essential to life and service to God. So, to whom do we go to invite people to serve God with us? A serious dilemma, is it not?

Our people have accepted the state's position on the poor—leave them to fend for themselves. The gospel we preach says all we attain is by the grace of God and is to be shared with the poor. We should be enraged that there are so many very seriously economically poor among us, not to mention poor in other parts of the world whom the church is charged to serve as well. It is folly to assume that the church is charged to serve only the people to whom we are presently ministering. By such an approach, we are defining

our ministry into obscurity. We must serve all the people of God without exception. So, we are called to minister to God's people.

We have talked about our calling, our ministry, our world, our church, and the people whom God has called us to serve. What Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount embraced concepts and Christian ethical principles for all times. We can still go to these words for support and guidance in what we do. And, if in our search for peace, justice, humility, meekness, mercy, and hunger for righteousness, we are reviled and persecuted, so be it. God is rewarding you and me. We rejoice and we are glad. Our reward is in heaven. Amen.

# Freed to Follow

by YVONNE V. DELK

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Text: John 21:9-17

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON describes a liberating God in a sermon verse called *Creation*. In vivid detail he tells of a God who yearns for community in the midst of the void and decides to create a world.

One can feel the power and passion as God empties itself into creation. James Weldon Johnson describes a God who can smile and the light breaks, who can walk and the footsteps hollow the valleys and bulge the mountains. He describes a God whose eyes blink and the lightning flashes, who claps and the thunder rolls. God speaks the words, "Bring forth," and fish swim the rivers and the seas, beasts roam the forests and the woods, and birds split the air with their wings.

However, after creating the earth and the heavens, the birds, trees, rivers, sun, moon, and stars, God is still lonely, still yearning for community, and decides to create that which can possess the image and likeness of God in human form. James Weldon Johnson describes God kneeling into the dust and clay of the earth like a mother bending over a baby; this is a God who is toiling and struggling to bring human life into existence.

After shaping the image, God gives it what it will need to survive—a mind so that it can reason and a body so that it can move upon the earth. But after all of God's work, the image is unable to free itself from the dust and clay of which it is a part. The image is fixed, frozen, locked in, closed in. The image is domesticated, confined to a space, bound and trapped.

And God, looking at the image, is still yearning for community. So once again, God kneels into the dust and clay, knowing that creation is not complete and breathes into the image the breath of God, the spirit of God.

At this point, the image becomes a living soul, a human person. Freed from its trappings, it is now free to love, to think, to hope, to act. It is free from the powers that would seek to domesticate, contain, or control it.

The image has been set free by the breath, wind, and spirit of God. The



pieces of its life have been pulled together in a sense of unity, cohesion, and power. Because it has been freed from its trappings, there is space to pursue the biblical vision of peace. Because of God's gift, the spirit has been broken open. It is now free to follow.

The creation account according to James Weldon Johnson is what God intends for the earth. But you and I know that we are not yet free. Our planet is not free. Much of life is trapped, frozen, locked in. Our world is imperiled in a state of emergency. The testimonies of human suffering are all around us: massive, increasing human rights violations (including torture, imprisonment, detentions, rapes, disappearances, and assassinations); widespread oppression; the worldwide resurgence of racism and the continuing pervasiveness of sexism and ageism; unconscionable numbers of homeless people—many of them women and children; refugees; exiles; addicts; runaway youth and street people; hunger and starvation; the haunting reality of nuclear war; the arrogance of humanity's mastery over creation which groans under the travail to which it is being subjected; the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The conclusion drawn from this testimony is obvious. The world is fragmented, torn asunder. It seemingly is divided against itself: east and west, north and south, both within and among nations and between humanity and creation.

This is not an easy time to stand under the name of Jesus Christ. Living the faith is not easy. Healing the wounds of our people is not easy. As the prophet Jeremiah (8:20, 22a) reminds us:

The harvest is past,  
The summer is ended,  
And we are not saved.  
Is there no balm in Gilead?  
Is there no physician there?

The summer for us has ended. We still are not saved, and yet God calls us to this place. After 178 years of service, this institution, in this place, is a sign that God does not give up on us. God is still struggling and toiling in the midst of creation's pain to free us to be the people of God and to offer us the opportunity to follow.

The call to follow comes in the context of our names, our history, our hopes, our betrayals, our denials. The call drives us back to find the rock upon which we can stand and be the church. The call drives us back to the

ground and source of our being to hear again, in a clear way, the words of the carpenter of Nazareth, "Follow me."

John 21:9-17 reminds us of that moment in our biblical history when the disciples were driven back to the ground and source of their being. They were experiencing anxiety about their future, their identity, and their mission in life. In times of anxiety and uncertainty, the disciples turned to the trade that they knew and practiced before they met Jesus.

The setting of the 21st chapter of John is the Sea of Galilee. Peter, the sons of Zebedee, and others are at their nets fishing. The Gospel suggests that following the crucifixion there was a temptation for the disciples to head home, back to Emmaus, back to the comforting ritual of business as usual. They returned to their old ways. They went back to fishing. However, fishing without a perspective, without an identity, without a future hope can yield very little. The journey back to their old way of life was therefore not very productive until Jesus, the source of their authority, enters the picture.

Jesus calls to them. He helps them to get a fix on their situation so that they can fill their nets and, then, waits for them to join him on the shore. It is at this moment that Peter remembers his first encounter with Jesus. All the trappings are present: the smell of the sea, his own boat, the overloaded nets of a miraculous catch, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). The echoes are strong and haunting.

In that original call there is a stark simplicity. Jesus says, "Follow me." They drop everything and go. There is no record that they had previously heard him preach, mulled over his message, and were therefore ripe for an invitation.

In the original call, Jesus did not lay out the details of what they might expect: "You'll join a vagabond community and live by begging. Eventually we'll go up to Jerusalem to confront the authorities. You will betray me and deny me and scatter. I'll be arrested, tried, and executed. Come follow me." That, certainly, was not the original call.

It was much simpler in that first go around. He offers neither program nor predictions but himself. Jesus calls them, and they follow, in Bonhoeffer's phrase as an act of "single-minded obedience."

Now, however, there is a little more water under the bridge. When Peter is called to follow in the resurrection, he knows a good deal more about what it means, where it leads, and even who he himself is. There is no room for naivete or bravado, even though a touch of fear might reasonably slip in. After all, Peter has just been confronted by the risen Lord with the very

prospect of his own martyrdom! You will stretch out your hands and another will carry you where you do not wish to go.

To meet Jesus crucified and risen is, at least, to face your own death. It is to understand as well your relation to the powers of this world.

What is new about the resurrection call to follow is that before the risen Lord, Peter becomes utterly vulnerable and transparent. Before the resurrection, Peter talked tough in the face of risk, making macho claims. Peter pledges never to fall away; he vows he's ready for prison and even death; he offers to lay down his life for Jesus. But in the hour of darkness, he's running on ego and comes up empty. He caves in, lies, and denies.

The resurrection means that Peter cannot deny the truth about himself. Perhaps he could turn away and refuse to see, but to look in the eyes of the crucified and risen Christ is to face himself. Looking there, Peter must surely die.

In the post-resurrection call, Jesus kindles a fire, prepares a meal, and communes with Peter. After a time of remembering the past, he turns to him and poses a question, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Jesus presses the question three times, and gets three replies, each more anguished than the last: "Lord, you know everything, you know my weakness, you know my love." Jesus sees through him and Peter knows it.

Peter, in fact, is loved in this encounter. Love surrounds the moment of the confrontation and makes it possible. Nothing, not even death, can separate Peter from that love. By it he is forgiven and freed and called again. By the love of Christ, Peter is healed for discipleship. The encounter of this disciple with the crucified and risen sovereign revealed at least three things: he had to face the truth about himself; he had to be forgiven and healed for discipleship; he had to be freed for the next step of the journey.

Two thousand years have passed since Jesus appeared to his disciples, and we gather here in the context of this communion service to claim again the reality of that resurrection and to make it incarnate in our lives. However, if the biblical record is to speak to us, we, too, must ask ourselves the same questions as we prepare to come to this holy table: What is the truth that we must face about ourselves? What is the healing and forgiveness that is needed if we are to be faithful in the call to discipleship? What is it that we need to be freed from if we are to take the next step of the journey?

Obviously each of us will have to answer those questions as we stand before God. However, as the preacher for this opening communion, permit

me to take the prerogative to offer an answer to the questions which I have posed.

The truth is that after 178 years of Princeton Seminary's service to Jesus Christ and his church in this nation, we who gather here are still the wilderness generation. We have not entered the promised land.

If we are ready to face that truth, then *there is a terrifying factor about the wilderness generation in the Old Testament which we must take to heart. The wilderness generation which emerges from Egypt's slavery never does reach the promised land.* Subconscious anxiety arises from the fact that we know this, but we don't want to admit it.

What will be ours is the odd glimpse from Nebo, but not possession of the land. Because, you see, we are those who must keep the faith in the wilderness. We are those who come into the wilderness from the Egypt of our recent historical past, and in this wilderness we must lose our gods so that we may come to our Sinai and find *our God!* And that is not easy.

In the story of Jesus' own temptation, our Lord went into the wilderness obeying an experience that had little specific direction. The dove came, as did peace and an affirmation of who he was. But the voice that said who he was did not send down from heaven a list of detailed instructions. It said merely that he was affirmed as a beloved son. It did not outline goals and directions for the next thirty-six months. And the temptations that he fought as a human in the wilderness were specific.

But when our Lord's temptation has ended, he goes back eighty-five miles to Capernaum and turning to two friends simply says, "Follow me."

The call to follow in the promised land is different from a call to follow in the wilderness. Following in the promised land is to bless and affirm what we see here as signs of God's reign; it is identifying so closely with the culture that we become culture's tool of conformity rather than Christ's instrument of transformation. Following in the promised land is to bless our nation right or wrong and to offer simplistic answers to complex questions.

Following in the wilderness demands that we abandon our gods of arrogance, pride, nationality, class, culture, race, Protestant rule, in order to be carriers of God's grace and vision into the world. To follow in the wilderness is to abandon the nationally-defined God of imperial triumphalism and to affirm the covenanting God who freely chooses to enter a relationship with a people who are merely a band of slaves with no standing, no power, no influence in the world. This God is defined by freely offered compassion to those who by the world's definition are the helpless, the oppressed, and the dispossessed. This God exists in the margins where the suffering is most

severe and offers us memory, hope, and compassion. This God calls us away from privatized religion that leaves behind any memory of the cost of discipleship and offers us an opportunity to be signs of hope and newness in the midst of the wilderness.

*If we are a wilderness generation, it is equally true that many of us are a wounded generation in desperate need of forgiveness and healing.* Like Peter, we make promises that we cannot keep. It is our deepest intention to stand up and be counted, to take risks for a right cause. But you and I know that when the moment of challenge comes, some of us have failed to back up our words with action, some of us have been too busy to respond, too concerned about protecting what we have to respond, too afraid to risk our position to respond.

It is not easy to leave the tombs of apathy or fear. It is not easy to live as people of hope in a world of fear. So we continue business as usual. We engage in ritualistic dancing of denial.

Ironically, it is Peter, the disciple who talked tough but in the moment of crisis caved in, that Jesus singles out and presses with the question, "Simon son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" I believe Jesus pressed the question three times because Simon had denied him three times. Jesus, therefore, in gracious forgiveness gave Simon the chance to wipe out the memory of a threefold denial by giving him the chance to make a threefold declaration of love.

Love surrounds the moment of confrontation and makes renewal possible. When hate is the driving force behind confrontation, the intent is to destroy, to wound, to inflict the kind of pain that will immobilize and defeat. However, when the moment of confrontation is surrounded by love and grace, forgiveness occurs, healing occurs and we are given the chance to begin again.

That moment came for me on a Sunday morning many years ago. I had stood in line to get into the Glide Memorial Church located in San Francisco to hear the Rev. Cecil Williams preach. Cecil had taken a downtown church that was dying and turned it around. He had created a genuine community that was open to all. The diversity of race, class, gay and straight, young and old was evident. It was a people's church and the people from the street attended. I moved into a crowded pew which I thought could not seat another person. I was wrong. I looked up and another person was crowding into my pew. The person moved past a number of persons to sit next to me. I could not decide if this was a male or female. The person was dressed in women's clothing and seemed to have all possessions in two shopping bags.



It was clear that this person had been living on the streets. I wondered why the person had come. The stockings that were worn were rolled to the knee revealing hairy legs. The wide hat hid a face that displayed no emotion. I tried not to look. I pretended to be busy meditating. I retreated into my tomb of "holiness."

The service progressed and suddenly Cecil Williams invited the congregation to stand to greet one another with the kiss of peace. The person on the other side of this strange-looking person quickly turned away to greet another person. I turned to the person on my other side, who had already reached out to someone else. Reluctantly, I turned to face the figure that was standing next to me. I closed my eyes and reached out for the embrace. Slowly I felt the arms reach back to embrace me. They held on to me so tight that I could feel the heart beat and hear the sobs. The tears began to flow. How long had it been since this person had been held, how long since this person had been touched?

I was in the presence of a huge mystery. A door swung open. I was in Christ's presence. I was being held. I was being loved in spite of myself. My "holier than thou" posture had been pierced. I opened my eyes, looked into this face and saw the living Christ. I was broken open. My guard was down. The person saw me for what I really was, forgave me, and loved me. I knew I would never be the same again.

Can we look into the face of the risen Christ as it is revealed in our sisters and brothers who are black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, white, lesbian, handi-capable, poor, abused—those who are struggling in all places of the world—and gain strength for the journey? If not, we will not find it in the bread and the wine of this communion table.

Ministry and mission are affairs of the heart. They are about ordering our lives by love and not by fear, for it is love that will restore us, energize us, and make us whole. Whenever we are confronted with who we are, our shortcomings, our failures, our weaknesses, it is God's abounding love and grace that forgives us and heals us and permits us to begin again.

Finally, sisters and brothers, *we are not only a wilderness generation, a wounded generation, but we are also the post-resurrection generation.* We are those who have encountered the crucified, risen Christ and we can no longer deny the truth about ourselves. We are those who have looked into the eyes of the crucified, risen Christ and have seen love, forgiveness, and grace.

We are those who have been called to this place in the midst of crucifixions, betrayals, and denials. We come, at the end of summer, to declare our

intentions to follow the crucified and risen Christ into the places of brokenness and pain in our world.

Summer has ended and we are no longer naive. We know what we are up against and God knows what we face. The final word in the resurrection is not from the powers and principalities, it is from God. This final word proclaims the sovereign freedom of God in history. The powers and principalities lay out their claims, set schemes in motion, make threats, execute plans. They set themselves against God. However, it is God who sets the limits and, in the resurrection, undoes their plans and executes the final freedom in history.

It is in this spirit that I invite each of us to the table of this opening communion. This is a moment for us to own the truth about ourselves, this institution, and our nation. This is a time to face the wounded places in our own lives, in the life of this seminary, and in our world. This is a moment to look into the face of the crucified, risen Christ and find the love, forgiveness, and grace that will free you to follow.

Summer has ended. We know the cost, we hear the call, and we yearn for the courage to follow. And so from the suffering, wounded places of the wilderness we respond:

Lead on O God of Freedom,  
We follow, yet with fears.  
But we shall come rejoicing,  
Though joy be born of tears;  
We are not lost though wandering,  
For by your light we come;  
And we are still your people.  
Your journey is our home.\*

\* *Everflowing Streams*, ed. Ruth C. Duck and Michael G. Bausch (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), p. 77.

# On Doing Something Beautiful

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

*Daniel L. Migliore is the Arthur M. Adams Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary, and the editor of The Princeton Seminary Bulletin. This sermon was preached in Park Presbyterian Church, Newark, N.Y. in September, 1989.*

Text: "She has done something beautiful to me." (Mt. 26:10)

IN THE GOSPEL STORY that we have just heard we are given a glimpse of the special beauty of the life that God invites us all to share. The story is disarmingly simple. When an unnamed woman interrupts a gathering where Jesus is present and pours expensive ointment on his head, the disciples scold her. Jesus, however, makes the remarkable promise that wherever the gospel is preached her action will be remembered. "She has done something beautiful to me," he says.

What makes something beautiful? I find it very difficult to define beauty, and I suspect that you do too. To be sure, we use the word often enough: in songs like "Oh beautiful, for spacious skies. . . ." or "Beautiful dreamer"; in our commercial life where we have our "beauty creams" and "beauty shops"; in our curious social rituals called "beauty contests" in which a "beauty queen" is crowned. Clearly the word is often on our lips, but are we sure we know what it really means? According to the newspaper ads, the fall fashions are beautiful. Is that what beautiful means? Nice to look at? Pretty? Did you know that studies show that in our society people who are considered attractive are more likely to be employed and more likely to receive raises than people considered unattractive? Does beautiful mean physically attractive? The dictionary defines "beautiful" as "having those qualities that give pleasure to our senses or that exalt our mind or spirit." A definition like that doesn't help very much, does it?

But there are, after all, lots of things people know well without being able to define. All of us have had experiences of beauty, and we do seem able to agree about some things that deserve to be called beautiful: an August sunset over Seneca Lake; the brilliant red and gold foliage along a New England country road; the colors and shapes of the scenes by Michelangelo in the Sistene Chapel; the photographs of our planet taken by the astronauts on the moon showing a sapphire blue globe encircled by white clouds against a pitch black sky. Surely we all know something about beauty even if we don't have the words to define it.

And we have an even firmer knowledge of what is ugly. Experience makes us all experts in ugliness. It surrounds us on every side. Countless

products and by-products of our modern industrial life are simply—ugly. I say this not as some counter-culture romantic but as a common-sense realist. We produce so much trash we don't know what to do with it. We are being choked by our own garbage; our streets and fields and streams are defaced and polluted by our ugly debris. And it is a chilling thought that all this environmental ugliness that we cause stems from our ugly attitudes and our ugly addictions. Let's face it: in our society we have many ugly addictions—from drugs to child abuse, from TV violence to real violence against people and nature, from racial hostility to nuclear weaponry—all very ugly and very deadly. So whatever difficulties we may have in giving definitions, beauty and ugliness are by no means unfamiliar to us.

Nevertheless, our understanding and appreciation of the beautiful needs to be continually corrected and deepened by the biblical witness. As with all of our assumptions and ideals, the Bible challenges and transforms our sense of the beautiful. Contrary to our consumer culture, it teaches us that the truly beautiful is not necessarily pretty. It is not necessarily nice-looking. The Bible cultivates in us a new desire for and a new sensitivity to beauty. It trains our eyes to see the beautiful even and especially in what is often ignored or despised. The Bible is no philosophy book, and no dictionary. It does not give us abstract definitions of God or humanity or truth or goodness or beauty or anything else. It often simply tells a story, like this story of the woman who poured expensive ointment on the head of Jesus shortly before the events of his passion and death. In just a few lines the story describes her startling gesture of love, the outrage of the disciples who thought it wasteful and insensitive to the needs of the poor, and the surprising response of Jesus: "She has done a beautiful thing to me."

We do not know the name of this woman (although in his telling of the story the evangelist John identifies her with Mary the sister of Martha). We do not know how she came to have an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment—whether she was a wealthy woman of refined taste and culture, or a woman of the street, a prostitute who had acquired her little fortune by selling her body, as Luke has it in his version of the episode. We know her only as a nameless woman whose anonymity somehow reminds us of the countless women whose lives and stories have been forgotten or excluded from recorded history. But Jesus refuses to forget or exclude this woman. He calls her action memorable and beautiful.

Why was it beautiful, and how does this storied description of the beautiful challenge our conventional ideas and experiences of beauty?

It is important to note first that what is described as beautiful in this story

is not *something* but an act, a deed, a gesture, something done by the woman. Contrary to our usual way of speaking, beauty is not a quality to be sought only in things, whether in jewels or in prized works of art. It is also—indeed it is primarily—to be found in acts, in what one does, in how one lives, in the way human beings relate to God and to each other. Beauty describes a graceful form of life; it describes first of all God's own life and then our human life as God intended it to be. You will not find the word beautiful often in the Bible. But you will find a closely related word—glory—very often. God is frequently described as glorious, and God's glory is seen in what God does, in the way God relates to us. In Christian vocabulary, beauty does not describe first a quality of things but what God is and does and what people are and do when their lives reflect God's own glory and radiance. "She has *done* a beautiful thing to me."

Then note further that what this woman does is to act with extravagant love and compassion for a fellow human being. She anointed Jesus with very expensive ointment. We do not know what past experiences may have led this woman to this act. Was her love born of deep suffering? intense remorse? great hope? Was she able to perceive that the shadow of a cross had fallen on Jesus because of the pain that she had known and experienced in her own life? We do not know. We know only that she acted with extravagant generosity. She gave Jesus everything she had. And in this way her action resembles God's own extravagant love, God's unrestricted generosity as taught by Jesus and as embodied in his own ministry and ultimate sacrifice. While her economic means are obviously very different from another woman of the gospel tradition who in her poverty placed the few coins she possessed in the collection plate, nevertheless the two women are alike in the sheer extravagance of their gifts. They hold nothing back. The extravagant love of these women bears eloquent witness to the boundless love of God who creates the world and blesses it so lavishly, to the extravagant love of Jesus Christ who "though rich became poor for our sake," to the myriad gifts of the Holy Spirit which are freely poured into the lives of all the people of God. This is what makes the woman's action beautiful: this shocking, unreserved, extravagant love which bears the imprint of the very beauty of the eternal life of God and of all of God's relationships with the world. The love of God is beautiful in its extravagance. And when this beautiful extravagance of the love of God finds a reflection in a human life, in a single human act, we catch a glimpse of what is truly beautiful. "She has done something *beautiful* to me."

And then observe carefully to whom the woman does her beautiful deed.



According to the story, she does it of course to Jesus. But who precisely is the Jesus of this story? He is Jesus on the way to his passion and death. In other words, this is not the pretty and undisturbing Jesus of so much popular religious imagination and art. This is Jesus about to become in every respect a wretched, poor, abused, and abandoned human being. This is Jesus soon to be imprisoned, tortured, and crucified. This is Jesus soon to be publicly executed on some ugly hill called Golgotha outside the city gates. All of which is intimated in the story by Jesus' own remark that the woman has prepared him for his burial and by the fact that the gospel writers follow this story immediately with the statement that Judas went out to betray Jesus. The Jesus of this story—Jesus soon to be crucified—is far from an attractive or pretty figure by our standards; he is rather the one of whom the prophet Isaiah said: "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2).

It is only when we understand the extreme deprivation and abject poverty of the Jesus to whom this woman expresses her extravagant love that we see through the deceptive and hypocritical objection of the disciples. They protest that the money should have been spent on the poor, but their talk of the poor is mere abstraction, empty rhetoric in view of the fact that a poor human being on the way to his death is right before their eyes. When Jesus says, the poor you have always with you, he is not providing justification for a complacent and callous attitude toward the poor of the earth. On the contrary, the point is that if the disciples cannot recognize the poverty and neediness of this one on the way to total deprivation and painful death for their sake and for the world, they are not likely ever to get beyond a merely theoretical concern for the poor. They are, like so many of us good church people and so many learned theologians, capable of talking endlessly about the importance of caring for the poor but incapable of making one concrete sacrifice, of expressing love for particular needy people right next to us. The woman or man who loves Jesus with the total abandon of the woman in this story will never be forgetful of the many poor brothers and sisters of Jesus. "She has done a beautiful thing to *me*,"—to Jesus, the Lord become servant, the poorest of the poor.

What might it mean for us to do something beautiful for Jesus as this woman did? How might our love for those in need find beautiful expression? There is no single answer to these questions that is right for all of us. Some time ago, a pastor of a church called me to seek my advice. He reported that the middle-aged son of a woman in his congregation had come to him and said that his mother was dying of mouth cancer. Wracked with

guilt, this man believed that he was responsible for his mother's cancer. He confessed that for years he had said mean and ugly things to his mother and to others and had often cursed God with his lips. As a result he believed that God was getting back at him, was punishing him for his words by causing cancer in his mother's mouth. "What do I tell him?" the pastor asked me. (This is the sort of question that professors of theology are supposed to know the answer to, but of course they can only stammer like all their fellow human beings in these situations, although they are adept at doing so at much greater length.) After a pause and a deep breath, I said to the pastor, Tell the man three things. First, tell him that human suffering is a deep mystery and its cause cannot always be traced back to something wicked that someone has done. Second, tell him that we believe in a forgiving God, not a God who vindictively punishes the innocent to get back at the guilty. And third, tell him that having recognized that he has been the source of ugly words and deeds in the past, he now has a chance to say and do something beautiful, to pray for his mother and for himself, and to be a caring and loving presence to her in the time that she has left.

What does it mean to do something beautiful in the name of Jesus Christ? There is not one but a million answers, and you could propose as many as I. Might it mean that all of us, individually and as a community, should concern ourselves far more about the ugly things that our way of life is doing to the earth and start relating to our environment in more caring, more healing, more beautiful ways? Might it mean that all of us, individually and as a community, should recognize the ugliness of hunger and disease and poverty in our world and work to overcome it with beautiful acts of concern and solidarity? Might it mean that all of us, individually and as a community, should expend ourselves less grudgingly, more liberally on behalf of the weak, the mentally retarded, the dying in our midst?

Doing something beautiful means all this and much more. It means allowing the beautiful good news of God to permeate and renew our lives, to allow God in Jesus Christ to captivate us by the beauty of the extravagance of his grace, to begin to live lives that by the world's standards may not be pretty or nice but are nonetheless in a mysterious way both graceful and gracious, extravagant in concern and compassion for the healing of all of God's creation, and hence beautiful in the sight of God.

And Jesus said: "She has done something beautiful to me. . . . Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

May God bless us, too, with the grace to do something beautiful.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Smith, Christine M. *Weaving The Sermon: Preaching In A Feminist Perspective*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 164. \$12.95.

"It is time that preaching reflect much more than just the experience of male preachers; it is time that the field and art of homiletics take seriously the new strands of transforming feminist vision" (p. 109). With these prophetic words Christine Smith, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Seminary, sounds the trumpet for a feminist homiletic that seeks radically to refurbish traditional, androcentric homiletics. To Smith preaching suffers primarily from its maleness, a patriarchal mindset that presumes in the pulpit a hierarchical stance and air of detachment, an intent to control parishioners' minds, and a rhetoric based in left-brained linearity. As counterpoint, Smith couches her view of preaching in contemporary feminist concerns, using as her controlling metaphor the figure of weaving, an image central to women's experience. She turns to feminist liberation theology for the strands to weave what she terms a distinctive homiletic out of the unique female experience.

Smith first establishes the loom of the feminist preacher's authority primarily in the experience of being a woman. Unlike the kind of verticality-in-authority assumed by so many male preachers, this authority lives on the horizontal plane of the preacher's mutuality and solidarity with the congregation, an authenticity emerging from a shared journey with the people in intimacy and vulnerability. Smith then strings her homiletical loom with the warp threads of critique that feature feminist theologians' revisioning of all the language, images, and metaphors central to Christian theology. She joins a chorus of feminist voices that demands the dethroning of the male monotheism that assumes possession of Christianity, and suggests in its place *not* an adjacent throne for the femaleness of the patriarchal deity, but a radically revalued God whose business is confronting all systems of domination and idolatry. Smith proposes a preacher's Jesus known only passingly as a historic male figure, but significantly as a universal parable of God who embodies such feminine virtues as intimacy, immediacy, and passion. This Jesus wears on his mantel the badge of contemporary women's concerns as he assaults conventionality with his iconoclastic voice and attacks dehumanizing structures. Smith also espouses "a feminist hermeneutics of creative actualization" that so reconstructs male chauvinist biblical history as to enable us to discover in scripture a vision of a discipleship of equals.

Across this warp of theological critique Smith weaves her weft of vision, what she calls "threads of global feminism," a way of perceiving the preacher's contemporary world. She concentrates especially upon the interwovenness of all forms of oppression, the call to work for peace and non-violence while living in harmony

with creation, and a woman's spirituality that transcends traditional Christian forms of expression and serves as fundamental ingredient for social transformation. Smith finishes her weft of vision by admitting from her own pastoral experience that preaching from this feminist bent, whether the preacher is female or male, will bring sure resistance from many parishioners and will try the preacher's faith and commitment. But such is the cost of vital personal and social transformation. This kind of preaching seems the only option for the church to regain its prophetic calling. Smith concludes her book with a brief chapter on four principles of sermon design—proportion, balance, emphasis, and rhythm—that are derived from the weaver's art.

With *Weaving The Sermon* Chris Smith does preaching a signal service by cogently and passionately bringing traditional, white-male-oriented homiletics under the first full-scale critique of feminist theology. This white, male reviewer is grateful to her for raising his consciousness and pricking his conscience in many helpful ways. Smith in effect demonstrates a homiletics of suspicion necessary to challenge many time-honored, yet sexist, assumptions about preaching. She helpfully summarizes a large range of feminist psychological and theological literature, a bonus for readers not well read in the field of women's concerns. While sharply critical of the patriarchy that binds the church and its preaching, she never loses touch with her fundamental love for and commitment to the church. She beautifully weaves a peace-and-justice vision into her homiletic, making concern for public issues a necessity. Throughout the book her honesty and integrity remain transparent, whether she takes issue with her own feminist colleagues or assumes a prophetic stance not easy for many parish preachers to take.

For all the merit in Smith's weaving, not all her threads seem firmly pulled together. Nor should we expect otherwise. The dialog over a feminist homiletic has barely begun. The continuing discussion, for instance, will need to involve far more references to contemporary homiletical literature. While *Weaving The Sermon* abounds in voices from feminist theology, it is surprisingly limited in its references to contemporary homiletical literature that could readily support her case. One gets the impression that Smith cites homileticians primarily as examples of androcentric homiletics (in some cases their writing is 8-10 years old, predating the surge of much feminist theology), while failing to mention current works by males on narrative preaching, or the corporateness of preaching, or imagination and preaching—all *de facto* feminist concerns. Further, since a number of male homileticians have already been writing over the last decade about such concerns as right-brained preaching, creative sermon shapes, shared non-hierarchical authority, metaphor and story in preaching—though not writing intentionally as radical feminists—what distinctions would we draw between these men's concerns and those of such a homiletician as Chris Smith? If both the radical feminist theologians and these male homileticians are responding to a larger liberation of sensibilities and spirit, then in feminist



fashion we need to honor that undergirding revolution by naming it. Otherwise we are left concluding that male homiletics in the feminist spirit is no more than an unconscious or closeted feminism, a conclusion not all male homileticians would embrace. Further, this reviewer wishes for an inclusiveness in Smith's approach that her presuppositions do not seem to allow. She early declares that there is a qualitative distinctiveness surrounding the preaching of feminist women (p. 9), but as she weaves the cloth of her new homiletic it seems strikingly familiar to fabrics already in existence. While her rhetoric seems to leave the door ajar for men to join a feminist homiletic, her passion for feminist distinctiveness and particularity practically closes that door. Hence the irony of males feeling left out of a homiletic that puts so much store in the feminist value of inclusiveness. Finally, one wishes that Smith could have extended the natural feminine leaning for particularity to details in the art of sermon creation. She applies her feminist perspective to the specifics of sermon design only in her brief final chapter. The reader is left hungering for specific examples of how this homiletic operates in the formation and expression of particular sermons. Perhaps a sequel to this volume could offer the brush strokes of particularity her persuasive arguments have us yearning for.

Whatever reservations one might have about *Weaving The Sermon*, they pale in comparison to the gratitude the homiletical world has for Chris Smith's venturesome work. All who read it will find themselves on the threshold of one of the most important revolutions in preaching today.

DON M. WARDLAW

McCormick Theological Seminary

Minus, Paul M. *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer*. New York: Macmillan, 1988. Pp. 243. \$19.95.

Born into the family of a German Baptist clergyman who taught at Rochester Seminary, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) followed his father into the ministry. In 1886, he moved to New York City to become pastor of the Second German Baptist Church, a largely working-class congregation on the edge of a notorious slum known as Hell's Kitchen. There he discovered that the pietistic Christianity of his upbringing did not adequately prepare him to address the poverty and degradation he witnessed. With the growing conviction that Christianity must aim at the redemption of society as well as individuals, he made advocacy of social change a key element of his ministry. After he assumed a professorship at Rochester in 1897, his ruminations on his experience in New York bore fruit in several widely acclaimed volumes which made him the theologian *par excellence* of the Social Gospel. Although this basic story is well known, we have long needed a fresh examination of Rauschenbusch. More than forty-five years have passed since the last full biography, and in the interim a vast quantity of his unpublished papers and letters



have been assembled. Paul Minus, a former professor of church history at the Methodist Theological Seminary in Ohio and now Executive Director of the Columbus-based Council for the Study of Ethics and Economics, has worked through this large corpus. The result is a well-written and compelling biography which deepens our understanding of an important figure in American church history. The book is also a timely one, for current interest in liberation theology and debates about the proper role of the churches in promoting peace and justice urgently demand that we learn more about earlier Christian social prophets.

Minus underscores what Winthrop Hudson has already documented in a recent collection of Rauschenbusch's writings: the latter's advocacy of reform was rooted in a deeply felt spirituality. While subsequent generations have sometimes opposed evangelical piety to social activism, the two were linked in the mind of Rauschenbusch. To be sure, he grew to believe that his evangelical background offered an inadequate social ethic, and as early as his seminary days he was showing a marked sympathy with liberal theology—witness a paper which he prepared on the subject of Horace Bushnell's theory of the atonement and which the professor judged "subversive of scriptural authority." Yet Rauschenbusch always retained a profound christocentric piety. He never sought to obliterate that piety with its emphasis upon winning men and women to Christ, but rather to broaden it by the inclusion of the social dimension. Or as he put the matter in an 1889 address to the Baptist Congress: "I claim that . . . [changing individual lives] is only one-half of the object of Christianity, that the other half is to bring in the Kingdom of God, and that the efforts of the Christian Church ought to be directed in a like measure to the accomplishment of that last object."

Minus also reminds us of aspects of Rauschenbusch's biography which often have received little attention. For example, he spent the first five years of his teaching career at Rochester in the German Department which trained pastors for German Baptist congregations. During this period, he was not so much the proponent of social Christianity as he was a spokesman for and to a religious community trying to negotiate a difficult passage between the opposing shoals of ethnic identity and Americanization. Minus also shows us that, as improbable as it may seem, Rauschenbusch enjoyed a close relationship with John D. Rockefeller, the latter not only funding important projects sponsored by Rauschenbusch but also supplying the professor with frequent personal gifts. That the great critic of the American economic order could sustain this relationship with the archcapitalist confirms that Rauschenbusch was moderate, even conservative, in important respects. Although he argued that socialism was the wave of the future, he eschewed doctrinaire positions, warned against violent revolution, and hoped for a gradual non-disruptive evolution of American society toward a more cooperative ideal. Yet if Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel was partly an extension of middle-class liberalism, Minus reminds us that it was also more. Unlike the subsequent caricature of Social Gos-

pelers as people naively believing that bourgeois reforms could bring in the Kingdom of God, the Rochester professor insisted that such changes could only yield "an approximation to a perfect social order. The Kingdom of God is always but coming." How that insight might have borne fruit in the changed climate following World War I can only be a matter of conjecture. Rauschenbusch lived long enough to see his hopes blighted in the trenches of Europe but not long enough to participate in the post-war theological reevaluation of the liberal tradition.

JAMES H. MOORHEAD

Princeton Theological Seminary

Fogarty, Gerald P. *American Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A History from the Early Republic to Vatican II*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989. Pp. 424. \$34.95.

Gerald Fogarty, a Jesuit teaching religious studies at the University of Virginia, has written a worthy addition to the Confessional Perspective Series sponsored by the Society of Biblical Literature. Impressively researched and cogently argued, this second volume in the series places special emphasis upon the relationship of biblical scholarship to the magisterium or teaching authority of the church. The result is a work illuminating many facets of American Catholic life.

Fogarty suggests that the history of Catholic biblical scholarship can be divided into several stages. During much of the nineteenth century when American critical studies scarcely existed, Catholics focused primarily on the problem of updating the Douay translation of the Vulgate, and Archbishop Francis Kenrick led in that endeavor. While Kenrick held largely pre-critical views on most biblical questions, he also exhibited a degree of flexibility on issues such as the extent of inspiration. By the end of the century, a handful of Catholic scholars advanced cautiously toward a fuller engagement with the new historical-critical method. Unfortunately the climate within the church was now less congenial to their efforts. In the wake of the First Vatican Council (1870), the Papacy promoted neo-Thomism, sought to Romanize the church throughout the world, and increasingly saw itself as the defender of a fixed deposit of faith. By 1893, Leo XIII had issued an encyclical warning against the dangers of the higher criticism. In 1902, he established a Biblical Commission which in the next decade asserted highly traditional views of the authorship of the Pentateuch, the historicity of the fourth Gospel, and the synoptic problem. Then in 1907 Pius X's anti-Modernist encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, in Fogarty's words, "virtually destroyed Catholic use of the historical method in biblical studies." The result was the dismissal of Henry Poels, one of American Catholicism's most promising biblical scholars, from the Catholic University; and other progressive voices were soon silent as well. Not until the creation of the Catholic Biblical Association in 1936 and the issuance of the Confraternity Edition of the New Testament in 1941 did American Catholicism again begin to inch toward

modern biblical scholarship. The decisive spur to that trend came with Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), an encyclical endorsing the use of historical and literary studies to deepen understanding of the Bible. Yet even as Catholic scholarship continued to mature and win the respect of outsiders, the church's biblical teachers were still not immune to accusations of being closet modernists. Only the approval of *Dei Verbum* in the closing session of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 finally put those charges to rest.

Aside from the immense amount of information he has provided, Fogarty's greatest contribution is to set the biblical question within a larger context. For example, nine years prior to the rejection of modernism, Pope Leo XIII had condemned in 1899 a heresy which he called Americanism. While it was distinct from modernism, Americanism raised a surprisingly similar issue: the limits of human freedom. In repudiating Americanism, Leo rejected the belief that the church ought to allow its members a liberty analogous to that enjoyed in modern liberal democracies. Similarly, the church rejected modernism out of fear that this heresy was claiming too much freedom for unaided human reason. In a word, both condemnations rested on anxiety about humanity throwing off the divinely appointed authority of the church. In an age when Rome found itself locked in battle in Italy, France, and Germany against states seeking to restrict its powers, that anxiety was more than purely intellectual.

Protestant readers who know little about the distinctive theological terminology and events of Roman Catholicism may find Fogarty's book rough going in spots, and they may occasionally get lost in the wealth of detail he provides. They would be well advised, however, to persist. This excellent study has much to teach, perhaps especially to Protestants who will benefit from a deeper understanding of the ways in which another community of Christians has grappled with the issues posed by modern biblical scholarship.

JAMES H. MOORHEAD  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Juan Luis Segundo, *An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 5 of *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. Pp. vii + 148. \$14.95.

Many women, children, and men are dying in today's Latin America, if not from the tortures of grinding poverty then from the waves of counter-insurgency when military agents and death-squads do their worst. Juan Luis Segundo addresses these features of the contemporary trauma as well as others, writing from his native Uruguay where he is presently a chaplain. He also draws from years of teaching there and at the universities of Harvard, Chicago, Toronto, Montreal, Birmingham, and São Paulo.

Since 1982, Segundo has been adding to his already multi-volume corpus by writing what is now a five-volume work on the overall theme, *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*. The topics addressed under this theme are not little ones: *Faith and Ideologies* (vol. 1), *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics* (vol. 2), *The Humanist Christology of Paul* (vol. 3), *The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises* (vol. 4).

In this fifth volume, Segundo continues to apply the interpretive principle he has practiced throughout his writing: historical comprehension of Jesus of Nazareth requires starting with some interpretive scheme that originates in the present with which we are involved (p. 7). Make no mistake, Segundo urges us also to be addressed by the past, by what meets us from Jesus of Nazareth. But Segundo is in the forefront of those who rightly remind us that the Jesus of history is not "discovered" apart from some appropriated present concern or scheme. Segundo is for historical rigor, but he knows also that "we must keep creating christologies day after day" (p. 1).

What then is Segundo's interpretive scheme in this volume? It features two striking convergences.

First, there is the convergence of political with ecological concerns. For too long, he writes, the political issues of class-oppression experienced by poor nations have been separate from the ecological ones concerning oppression of the nature-system, of which richer nations are now more aware. This conjunction, developed so incisively by Segundo here, is a creative step among today's liberation theologies.

Second, there is the convergence of evolutionary and christological perspectives. This convergence is highlighted in the book's basic question: how can Jesus of Nazareth be understood within an evolutionary understanding of reality? This second convergence is the means for addressing the political/ecological plight of Latin America and all continents.

To understand Jesus of Nazareth within an evolutionary process, readers will have to read patiently with Segundo as he explores the evolutionary thought of not only theologian-paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin, but also evolutionary thinkers like Darwin, Alfred Wallace, Jacques Monod, and especially anthropologist Gregory Bateson.

The dynamic of evolutionary process that is most important for christology is the interplay of "entropy" and "negentropy." These terms name the two parameters of evolutionary process: the first, a reigning general tendency in all life toward degeneration or "degradation of energy" (p. 45); the second, a capacity for flexibility amidst entropy that enables formation of new circuits integrating all components "in a better more central way" (p. 63).

Jesus of Nazareth is a human being situated at a crucial point in the process of universal evolution. His life and message "dovetail with the line of growing negentropy," always flexible in relation to the other parameter of "entropy" to which he adapted. This adaptation is evident throughout his life and work, but nowhere more present than in the interplay of his death and resurrection. The interplay of



death and resurrection in Jesus' "kingdom-project" recapitulates the evolutionary interplay of entropy and negentropy, and then sets the parameters of a liberative discipleship of love. This "love" is understood as the risky venture of exposing ourselves to death and decentering (entropy) in order to give rise to new healing centers, new circuits of life (negentropy). Deaths nurture life. Even the death of the innocents of Latin America are so interpreted. Quoting Mario Benedetti, Segundo affirms: "... their defeat is joined and knitted with the earth, and buds and is born again with banners and dreams that flame into promises happily fulfilled ..." (p. 121). Segundo's work and Benedetti's words develop the logic implicit in many Latin American poets, for example, Julia Esquivel, who claims that the lives of Latin America's dead "threaten us with resurrection."

Segundo's book should be read by all who are struggling for meaning within the radical evil of our time, and Segundo gives new, creative shape to a liberation theology linking Christ and evolution, the ecological and the political.

I must register three reservations. First, there is surprisingly little reflection by Segundo about the implications of his evolutionary views for an understanding of evil. One is led to expect that Segundo's many reflections on entropy, and on death's relation to evolving life, might also offer a creative response to problems of evil. Segundo's work should not be cast as an exercise in theodicy, nor am I suggesting it should have become one, but human questioning about evil, and how to respond to it, will no doubt lurk in the minds of many readers and present obstacles to affirming Segundo's affirmations of death.

Second, this book features precious few qualifications concerning death's "positive side" of contributing to evolving life. Segundo acknowledges that death's meaningfulness is often "invisible and anguishing," but rarely does he acknowledge what Jewish theologian Arthur Cohen sees in the holocaust, a non-reducible meaninglessness that makes evil the *mysterium tremendum* that it is. Does not just one act of human torture (not to mention the massacres of whole villages and the regular work of the death-squads) present to us a horrific meaninglessness? This is not to deny the potential meaningfulness of death and suffering that we need to hear articulated by Segundo, Benedetti, Esquivel and others, but mobilizing our resistance to systems of unjust death may require articulating also our sense of their meaninglessness.

Finally, Segundo perhaps needs to clarify further the issue of *who* precisely needs to affirm death and *how different* this affirmation may be depending on a person's access to life-nurturing power. The victims of chronic power abuse, for example, may need to hear that "to prolong one's own energy autonomy" is not necessarily the "futile desire" that it indeed may be for more privileged North Atlantic persons. I am not suggesting that victims have the right simply to play out an egotistical autonomy. But those who are already given to the daily death worked by classism and racism and other oppressions will need to affirm death in a very different way than do those of us who live in systems benefitting from those distortions. Further



exploration of this difference would make more persuasive Segundo's claim that it is through the affirmation of death that life for all is truly nurtured.

MARK KLINE TAYLOR

Princeton Theological Seminary

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, & Herman J. Ruether. *The Wrath of Jonah*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. xxi + 277. \$19.95.

This is a courageous book. Written by a wife/husband team, Rosemary being a theologian and Herman a political scientist, it makes an important contribution to the discussion concerning the crisis in the land of Palestine/Israel.

A large part of the book consists in telling the story of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians. And herein lies its courageousness, for the Ruethers tell the story truthfully and defenders of Israel, for the most part, do not want a truthful telling of the story. There are documents aplenty to show that the history of Zionism and of Israel is filled with deception and prevarication—with "disinformation." The Ruethers, in their telling of the story, take full account of these documents. As Henry Schwartzschild, a courageous Jewish spokesman, says on the jacket of the book, "Jews and supporters of Israel, especially, will find much important discomfort in this welcome book."

The Ruethers do more, though, than tell the story of the conflict honestly. They set their telling of the story within the context of a discussion of the religious and theological background of the conflict, and the religious and theological consequences of the conflict. It is this combination of an articulate discussion of the religious/theological background and consequences, with an honest telling of the story, that makes this book an important and distinctive contribution to the vast literature surrounding Zionism and modern Israel.

The Ruethers have a thesis. Their thesis is that from of old there has been a conflict between two strands within Judaism, a particularist strand which insists that Jews are specially loved by God and in consequence have special rights and ought to have special privileges among the peoples of the earth, and a universalist strand which insists that God loves all humanity and that the uniqueness of the Jews before God is not that they are specially loved and not that they have special rights, but that they have been called to spread this message of God's universal love. The Ruethers show how this ancient conflict came to the surface again in the Zionist movement. And their thesis is that the universalist strand has gradually lost out; the deepest root of the present conflict lies in the exclusivist practices of Israel and the particularist character of the claims of those who defend these practices.

Here is perhaps the best statement of their thesis:

We have suggested throughout this study that there are two different ways of construing the relationship of the particular and the universal. Both of these ways have existed in the Jewish tradition. One of these ways is to construe

one's particular identity, in this case as a national, ethnic, and religious community, as unique and incomparable with the particularity of any other community. One's particularity separates this people from all other people and calls them to special obedience to God. This separation from other nations is construed as conferring a special holiness on the Jewish people. The gift of the land is seen as giving Jews apriori rights to the land that supercedes that of any other people. . . .

The universalist tradition affirms Jewish particularity in solidarity with the particularity of other people. Concern for Jewish distinctiveness grounds an equal concern for the rights of other people to exist in distinct ways. Human beings must limit the claims of their own distinctiveness in order to accommodate themselves to the rights of others to live, side by side, with themselves. This is the fundamental biblical ethic of "loving the neighbor as oneself (pp. 244-45).

What is said here seems to me essentially correct. Moral particularism is one of the strands in historic Judaism and lies deep in the ideology of Zionism and the practice of Israel; it makes conflict with the Palestinians inevitable and intractable. But at various points in their book, the Ruethers blend these observations about moral particularism with another, and to my mind, highly questionable, thesis. They suggest that if religious groups and communities are to live in justice and peace with each other, each must give up the claim that in one way or another its religion is better than the other; they must come to regard the competitors as equally good with their own religion. In particular, Christians must "move from a supercessionary to a peer relation between Christianity and Judaism, as religions of salvation of equivalent value" (p. 206). Given this claim, it is, of course, not at all surprising that we are reminded of Rosemary Ruether's thesis in her earlier book, *Faith and Fratricide*, that "Christology and anti-Judaism are interwoven, not only recently, but within the New Testament itself," and that, accordingly, "anti-Semitism cannot be dismissed simply as a product of an ancient or modern 'paganism' " (p. 205).

I fail to see any cogency whatsoever in this argument. What is there inconsistent in the beliefs of someone who accepts the New Testament claims about Jesus while fighting to the death for a 'liberal' polity in which no differentiation whatsoever is made between the rights of those who accept these claims and those who do not? To defend a genuinely pluralist society, one does not have to become a religious relativist. To believe that Jewish people are of equal value in the eyes of God as Christians, and should have equal rights in society, one does not have to believe that Judaism is just as good and right and true as Christianity. Correspondingly, a Jew without inconsistency can defend my equal rights as a Christian in some polity while yet thinking that I am misguided in what I believe about Jesus. And fortunately so. For I think there is no chance whatsoever that the bulk of the adherents

of any of the world's great religions will be brought to regard other religions as of equal value with their own. If justice must await such relativizing of religious conviction, we are indeed lost.

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Boone, Kathleen C. *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. Pp. 139. \$10.95.

"Why," asks Kathleen Boone, "should the Rev. Jerry Falwell be more closely linked to the Bible than the Archbishop of Canterbury?" While all Christians hold the Bible as sacred scripture, fundamentalists lay a special claim for themselves (as "Bible believers") and for the text (as the inerrant, literal Word of God). The present analysis, however, challenges this polemical insistence on the "Bible alone," and the corresponding hermeneutical attempt to allow the Bible to speak "for itself."

Boone's approach is to examine the authority of the Bible as it actually functions in the fundamentalist community—"reading the text with them in order to read the text of fundamentalism." Accordingly she seeks to complement existing historical, sociological, and theological studies through the application of literary theory.

Drawing upon her doctoral studies in English, Boone skillfully leads even the inexperienced person into the field of literary theory. She argues that fundamentalist claims for the Bible are ultimately reliant upon literary theories, similar to those of E. D. Hirsch, in which all discourse has a single determinate meaning. Contrary to this presupposition, however, the actual analysis of fundamentalist texts reveals a diversity of meanings dependent upon the interpreter's assumptions. These divergent assumptions may be as extensive as those proposed by dispensationalists, or as seemingly insignificant as the minor issues splintering fundamentalist sects. In any case, there is clearly more operative in biblical interpretation than the mere reiteration of the "text itself."

Boone contrasts the interpretive theories of E. D. Hirsch with those of Stanley Fish and Michel Foucault. From these alternative perspectives, there is a communal "discourse" which necessarily controls fundamentalist interpretations of the biblical text—an interrelated "web" (Foucault) of text, commentary, experience, and personality which defines the "interpretive community" (Fish). Shared presuppositions—preeminently the sole authority of an inerrant Bible literally interpreted—shape the "rules" of discourse (Foucault) resulting in a distinctive interpretive stance. In this way certain interpretations are prescribed, others proscribed, and an appropriate field of discussion demarcated.

Within this hermeneutical framework, authority is located not only in the text, but also in the community of interpretation and its field of discourse. "The author-

ity of fundamentalism arises in the reciprocal relations of text, preachers, commentators, and ordinary readers."

Such a nexus of authority is not unique to fundamentalism; it is operative in all interpretive communities. But fundamentalism's vituperative denial of extra-textual authority renders its own claims uniquely dangerous. For when an interpreter professes to expound only the "plain sense" of the biblical text, that person's interpretation is equated with the very Word of God. This systematic effacing of the human element in interpretation accordingly promotes a usurpation of God's authority, rather than its faithful promulgation.

Given the scope and cross-disciplinary interests of Boone's study, there are inevitably limitations. For one, Boone's consolidation of fundamentalism and evangelicalism into a single discourse remains unpersuasive. The present evangelical community has largely repudiated the anti-intellectual, reactionary, and authoritarian tendencies of fundamentalism. Indeed, most of the same hermeneutical problems that Boone cites in regard to inerrancy have been raised within the evangelical community, thereby expanding its discourse. Boone's professedly "ahistorical" approach has apparently missed this dynamic character.

Second, Boone is sometimes unable to sustain her efforts to read scripture with fundamentalists. Her assertion, for example, that inerrancy claims are obviously "imponderable" and "useless" will undoubtedly be used by fundamentalists as grounds to dismiss even her more thoughtful and substantive evaluations. Conversely, Boone's own critical position may be challenged by the widely noted crisis of authority within literary theory. When the hermeneutical assumptions undergirding Boone's analysis are thus questioned, so are her conclusions.

Finally, related to these questions of evaluation are the various unexplored alternatives to fundamentalist conceptions of authority. The interpretive issues raised by literary theory must be addressed by all communities of faith; yet the described communal character of discourse makes adjudication among competing communities problematical. Readers are thus left to grapple with the basic issues of authority and interpretation within their own communities. In this regard, members of any scriptural community will profit from Boone's careful analysis of fundamentalism and the larger issues of scriptural authority and interpretation which she raises.

STEPHEN L. STELL

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Plaskow, Judith, and Carol P. Christ, editors. *Weaving The Visions: New Patterns In Feminist Spirituality*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. 359. \$12.95.

Ten years ago these same two authors, Plaskow and Christ, combined their feminist insight and scholarship in the editing of *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*. From 1979 to 1989 there has been tremendous expansion and change in feminist theology, and a deepening respect for the diverse experiences and resources



that compose feminist spirituality. As an important sequel to this first anthology, *Weaving the Visions* provides us with an even greater variety of images, methodologies, rituals, and narrative insights that emerge from women's spiritual and political lives. In the authors' voices, "When we learn to claim the diversity of women's lives as an important resource and to appreciate the various strategies for survival and resistance that come out of our particular histories, the concept of women's experience takes on new richness and meaning." This volume epitomizes the tenet that feminist and womanist religious and theological reflection begins with the real lived experiences of women.

Even though the volume represents thirty-three diverse authors, and contains an amazing variety of religious perspectives, Christ and Plaskow have successfully overcome reinforced separations among feminists and womanists by organizing the book thematically. The book moves from "Our Heritage Is Our Power," to "Naming The Sacred," to "Self In Relation," and finally concludes with "Transforming The World." I believe these themes powerfully reflect the way countless women experience and conceptualize their spiritual and political work.

There are many aspects of this volume that I appreciate, but two observations seem most important. Even though feminist and womanist theology is still relatively new, there is a growing body of literature that has been widely read, reflected upon, and discussed by large numbers of women in the United States. One of the distinctive contributions of this volume is that it brings together much of that foundational literature. Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" has provided women and men with a provocative discussion of excellence and power for the past decade. Beverly Wildung Harrison's article on "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," has invited women and men to re-examine the role anger plays in our ethical action in the world, and explores the basepoints for a feminist moral theology. Delores S. Williams and her ground-breaking work in the area of womanist theology has challenged diverse religious thinkers to rethink the agenda and urgency of contemporary theological scholarship and praxis. Katie Geneva Cannon's ethical and moral insights into Black women's literary tradition compel us to expand our understandings of moral agency. She says, "Black women's literature offers the sharpest available view of the Black community's soul." Carter Heyward and her passionate voice about sexuality, love, and justice has offered a transforming vision of relationality and revolution for countless religious communities, and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite continues to awaken our awareness about the pervasiveness of male violence and its shaping impact on the lives of millions of women. The volume also includes such familiar voices as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Nelle Morton, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Paula Gunn Allen, and Naomi Goldenberg.

The second observation about the book is equally important. Not only does it "collect" many significant and widely read pieces of feminist and womanist literature, but this volume also pushes the reader to expand and deepen one's definitions and expressions of spirituality. Regardless of one's religious tradition, readers will find a number of articles exposing them to new aspects of spiritual experience and



wisdom. Ancestor reverence in African traditions, the history of lesbians in medieval Christian Europe, the repression of powerful female deities within the male-dominant Azteca-Mexica culture, the philosophy behind contemporary Haitian Voodoo, and an exploration of a New World Tribal process emerging from Native American traditions represent only a few of the broad topics considered in these pages.

As diverse as the volume is, it excludes at least two perspectives that seem critical. The voice and spiritual wisdom of older women has no explicit expression, and the distinctive spiritual insights of differently abled women are poignantly absent. The omission of these voices reflects a kind of silence and oppression still present in feminist and womanist reflection.

Whether one has read in the field of feminist spirituality for years, or one is newly interested in this area of transforming thought, this book will be very important reading. It provides an important invitation and focus for vastly different women to speak to each other, and to the world.

CHRISTINE M. SMITH  
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van Beeck, Frans Joseph, S.J., *God Encountered: A Contemporary Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1 of *Understanding the Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989. Pp. 338. \$27.95.

As the title indicates, this is the first volume of a three-volume systematic theology. Frans Josef van Beeck is a Dutch Jesuit who has taught at Cambridge and now holds a chair in theology at Loyola University in Chicago. This is a *catholic* theology, but that does not mean that the author directs himself only to a Roman Catholic audience. The "catholicity" which is distinctive of this work is that which is characteristic of the "great tradition" of the undivided Church: it is the faith in its fullness and integrity. To this *catholicity* the author contrasts two other attitudes which have been characteristic of theological systems since the Enlightenment: reductionistic, rationalistic "modernism," which lapses into deism, on the one hand, and obsessively orthodox "integralism" (and its protestant cousins such as fundamentalism), on the other. Both of these other approaches, opposite as they may seem, share a compulsion to reduce the mystery of God to what can be contained in tight systems of "clear and distinct ideas."

The Christian faith has three interrelated components in van Beeck's system—worship, teaching, and living. All are rooted in the Christian encounter with God, and they really represent the great tradition from three perspectives. Van Beeck insists that each component must be presented in its interrelationship with the others, and that worship is the matrix of the other two. Like Geoffrey Wainwright, van Beeck writes a doxological theology.

This first volume presents an introduction and a viewpoint. It insists that the task of theology is *understanding* the great tradition rather than judgment or correction.

It argues for a plurality of theological systems. The second volume will deal with the divine *exitus*—God's gracious approach to us in creation and incarnation; the third will deal with the human *reditus* evoked by God, with our "elevation, by way of worship, sacrament, church community, mission, and Christian ethics . . . to full participation in the divine nature" (p. 88).

The catholicity of the approach is indicative of van Beeck's finely-tuned balance. He is able to incorporate contemporary interests—for example, narrative, eschatology, Lindbeck's cultural linguistic systems with their distinctive grammar, and a strong ecumenical concern—into his system without losing this balance.

Given the author's expressed admiration for the Orthodox tradition of the East, his system might be enriched by reference to contemporary Orthodox theology (the work of Georges Florovsky and Alexander Schmemmann should be congenial to his outlook). In diagnosing the ills of the present state of theology, he might perhaps also put part of the blame for intellectual hybris of doctrinal overdefinition on mediaeval scholasticism, rather than following the current fashion of laying it all on the Enlightenment.

While, from my perspective, the author has placed the relation of nature and grace (likewise natural religion and positive religion, reason and faith) correctly, this is a theme that needs sharper articulation and closer argumentation in an era where Karl Barth still looms large. One hopes for a more detailed treatment of these themes and others (such as Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity) in volume II. While I share his non-propositionalist viewpoint, I also believe that doctrine needs somewhat sharper contours in its articulation than he frequently gives it.

These are minor reservations. Van Beeck's work is not easy reading, but his focus on catholicity—on the fullness of the faith—is an important corrective in the current debate. Churches of the Reformation as well as the Roman Catholic Church need to remember that the task of theology is understanding the witness of the great tradition of the undivided church and relating it to the cultural context of the day, rather than creating a "new theology" or simply reiterating an "old theology." The catholicity of this tradition is best preserved by a theology which keeps its focus on the creedal center of the faith and does not throw its witness out of proportion by moving even such important issues as justification to the center, or by overdefining peripheral doctrines and raising them to equal importance with the creedal affirmations.

For van Beeck, theology is mystagogical in nature. The reader senses in this book that the author has indeed encountered the mystery of the living God and that this encounter has shaped his theology. He bears faithful witness to the mystery, yet does not claim to have captured it and rendered it without remainder in his system. That is the mark of a true theologian.

BYRON DAVID STUHLMAN  
Duke University

Placher, William C. *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 178. \$13.95.

In my seminary days, I was assigned to read Langdon Gilkey's *Naming the Whirlwind*. For hundreds of pages the book presented and described the cultural-intellectual *Geist* in the midst of which we were living and in the face of which Christian theology would have to be done. After this impressive and helpful offering of what (seemingly) everyone was saying, Gilkey got around to stating what *he* thought ought to be done. I can't remember what his point was, and I have little interest in going back to retrieve it. But even today I continue to be grateful to Gilkey for distilling so many sources of intellectual vitality. I feel somewhat the same about William Placher's book, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation*.

But lest this seem a somewhat back-handed compliment, let me go on to say that Placher's book makes a point that is worth making, and it makes it well. And the point is this: Christian theology has a part to play in the conversation of worldviews that is going on today. The Christian faith has a distinctive voice in this conversation for which no apology is needed; i.e., a voice that does not require some prior justification before it may be allowed to speak. To make this point Placher assails the Enlightenment ideal of an assumption-free rationality upon which the foundations of knowledge can be firmly and lastingly set. He reviews the most important recent thinking on this matter and concludes that the fact that all our thinking is conditioned does not preclude us from thinking thoughts which are true. Placher's goal is to help his readers to find a means to resist intellectual imperialism of every sort, including the imperialism of nihilistic relativity.

The strength of this book is Placher's description of the pluralistic context in which we find ourselves and the reasons why a Christian voice ought to be audible in this pluralistic conversation. The weakness of the book is Placher's account of the nature of truth, according to which he claims that the truth of Christian theology becomes apparent in the emerging pattern of a life lived Christianly. So far, so good. But what sort of pattern is this? Placher doesn't say. He is content with the formal point he has made.

This is a rather predictable outcome, given who Placher himself selects for *his* conversation partners: viz., academics, and exclusively white male academics working out of the philosophical traditions of northern Europe. But what about the conversation engaged by liberation theology? What about the non-person to whom liberation theology is addressed? Placher's question remains the old question of how to speak of God in light of the Enlightenment. Is that really any longer the crucial Christian question? Whether it is or it isn't, the response to that question tells one little or nothing about what a Christian pattern of living is like, and a book preoccupied with that question is unlikely to move from the level of abstraction.

Placher is certainly right to question the modernist worldview bequeathed to us

by the Enlightenment, but, as Gutierrez has pointed out, criticism of this worldview will have minimal impact as long as those who have an economic interest in sustaining the modern ideology are still in charge. And they are still in charge, and therein lies the principal antagonist to the Christian voice in the pluralist conversation.

JEFFREY C. EATON

Emanuel Ev. Lutheran Church

New Brunswick, N.J.

Beach, Waldo. *Christian Ethics in the Protestant Tradition*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. Pp. 149. \$9.95

In an age when the moral structure of our common life has been shaken at every level and the forces which move our world seem out of control, it takes considerable courage to lay out in 150 pages a Christian ethic in theory and in practice. Yet this is what Waldo Beach has done. He draws on a lifetime of teaching and study in the field. Out of it he pulls together with simple clarity the elements of interchurch debate about the bases and principles of Christian ethics, and sets forth his own way of moving between the context of faith and the context of fact in the human situation. Then he proceeds to explore in brief sketches most of the major fields of moral practice in which Christians are involved: sexuality and marriage, birthing and dying, race relations, man-woman relations, economic, ecological, and political ethics, and international relations in a nuclear age.

None of this can be done profoundly. This is a guidebook, not a voyage of discovery. As such, however, it is enormously useful, for church groups learning about ethics in the context of faith, for pastors seeking a brief refresher course, and for students as a way into the field. Beach is Protestant in the classic manner, starting not from the Catholic hierarchy of natural law and supernatural revelation, but with the action of divine grace grasped by faith and expressed in love, justifying and sanctifying sinful humanity. He is ecumenical in setting forth fairly the different perspectives from fundamentalist to liberal which arise in this context. The best chapter in the book, in this writer's opinion, is on "The Faith-Premises of Christian Ethics," where he deals with epistemology, ontology, anthropology, covenant theology, soteriology, and eschatology as they describe the way we live, responding to God's action in this world. He is also helpful in clarifying the relation between love and justice in the context of our common life.

The brief chapters on practical ethics are only snapshots of broad fields. In sexuality and marriage questions, the author is conservative but open. In race, economics, ecology, politics, and international affairs, he reflects and often quotes from the mainline church consensus. In general, he opens questions up rather than arguing a point of view. In the space at his disposal, he cannot go very deeply into any issue.



Still, he locates issues and invites the reader to explore them further, helped considerably by a good bibliography at the end of the book.

CHARLES C. WEST  
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Vaughn, Joe. *Family Intervention: Hope For Families Struggling With Alcohol and Drugs*. Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 112. \$7.95.

The uniqueness of this self-help book lies in its ability to successfully address both the practical strategies of a chemical dependency intervention and the complex dynamics of the chemically dependent family system. Through the use of case vignettes, careful explanation, and practical suggestions, Vaughn is able not only to describe the primary steps necessary for conducting an intervention, but to help family members understand their own involvement in the system of denial and avoidance that characterizes the chemically dependent family. There is no suggestion of blame, justification, or condescension. There is only a straightforward and clear understanding of what happens when a family works together to protect a chemically dependent person from the consequences of her or his chemical use. The book is directed to family members and offers the family various resources toward understanding itself and toward seeking ways to become more healthy.

The most helpful feature of this book is its clarity. The author carefully works through, first with a case presentation and then with several theoretical chapters, the method of chemical dependency intervention. He defines and describes the intervention procedure and then spends several chapters on why this strategy helps the family break through its destructive patterns. The middle part of the book focuses on the details of the intervention method and the common concerns and questions about conducting an intervention. The book ends with some suggestions about how to use the intervention approach with other family problems such as compulsive gambling, anorexia/bulimia, and family violence. These other family system problems are addressed in more sketchy or suggestive ways than are the chapters dealing with chemical dependency in the family.

Throughout the book Vaughn works to integrate the spiritual component of people's lives into the dynamics of chemical dependency and into the process of healing and recovery. He discusses the valuable role of the pastor in assisting with an intervention and encourages families to involve the pastor in the planning, conducting, and follow-up of the intervention process. He puts considerable emphasis on the parallels between the emotional bankruptcy resulting from chemical dependency and the accompanying spiritual bankruptcy.

Vaughn devotes one entire chapter to the role of faith in the recovery process. In that chapter he offers some helpful suggestions about the importance of re-establishing a faith journey as part of the recovery process. He sensitively looks at the reasons people in the midst of a chemically dependent system avoid their spiritual



needs and then offers some resources for bringing God into the healing process. There is somewhat of a tendency here to over-simplify the faith journey, making it rather linear and step-by-step. This tends to distort the complexity and more spiral nature of both therapeutic and faith growth. The important resources and insights that Vaughn has to offer here are cheated by this occasional linear reduction.

Vaughn raises some of the debate about the intervention method and some of the cautions about its use. However, the book would have been strengthened had he focused more on the potential risks to a successful intervention when done without professional guidance. As he discusses in several chapters, the family of the chemical abuser may also have significant blindspots and there is the potential that those may derail an intervention that is done without adequate professional consultation or guidance. Vaughn recognizes the risk but leaves the caution behind too easily. It would have helped had he more clearly highlighted the risks and potential dangers of family intervention done without professional guidance.

Despite this optimistic bias, the book is well-written, clear, and full of important resources for anyone involved with a chemically dependent family. It is useful to family and helping professional alike. Clergy will find the holistic approach, which takes seriously the psychological, the social, and the spiritual complexity of individuals and families, to be especially useful.

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Princeton Theological Seminary

Emerson, James G. *Suffering: Its Meaning and Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986. Pp. 176. \$8.95.

James G. Emerson is the senior minister at the Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, and a longtime leader in the field of pastoral care and pastoral theology. Unlike many persons who have treated the theme of suffering, Emerson has made a radical distinction between pain and suffering in this book. Pain is something that happens to us, but "Suffering, by contrast, is what we choose to do with pain" (p. 21). To suffer is to choose to endure and to find meaning through the endurance.

Based on the concept of suffering as chosen endurance of distress, Emerson developed his key idea of *suffering work*. "Suffering work is the work done to move through a situation of pain to moment of healing" (p. 16). There are no fixed stages for the work of suffering, as differing persons and situations find their own way, with the help of a healer who is him or herself still in the process of being healed, to the moment of healing. Emerson, of course, acknowledges that not all suffering work leads to physical healing, but he does believe it leads to a wholeness of soul (p. 29).

He is able to find many examples of this rather heroic view of suffering both in Christian history, with Jesus himself being the chief exemplar, his own pastoral

work, and that of other ministers. One of the great strengths of this book is Emerson's refusal to separate individual from corporate suffering. Clearly, one of the principal inspirational factors in motivating him to write such a book was his deep study of the holocaust, where he was able to see clearly the profound link between individual and corporate suffering. He believes that the same basic principles of suffering work apply equally to corporate suffering as they do to individual suffering. In both cases the ability to find meaning in the suffering is the key.

Borrowing the term shadow from Jung (although rejecting what he perceived to be Jung's use of this term to mean opposition to light), Emerson gives the term shadow a central place in the suffering of the healer in the healing process. He holds the shadow to be a dimension of light, the cauldron of energy within the healer, out of which will come "... something for the creative or demonic" (p. 121). Emerson draws an analogy for the shadow from the dark section between the two parts of the double rainbow, which takes the light of the first rainbow to create the second (p. 123). He likens this transformation to the power which comes to Christians in "... the light of Christ." In these passages Emerson reveals his profound faith that God can indeed act through the suffering of the healer to effect positive change in those who choose to engage in the work of suffering.

I must point out that Emerson is fully aware of the distortions which have occurred in Christian history regarding the experience of suffering. He knows that some have turned suffering into a way of life to protect themselves from what they perceive to be even greater suffering, and that some still do. Nevertheless, he argues convincingly that constructive suffering is indeed a mode of existence which must be worked through if real healing is to be attained.

I can recommend this volume as one written from deep experience with the meaning of Christian suffering. It is like a canvas painted in broad strokes, containing much inspiration and insight.

JAMES N. LAPSLEY  
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Oden, Thomas C. *Ministry Through Word and Sacrament*. New York: Crossroad, 1989. Pp. ix + 232. \$19.95.

*Ministry Through Word and Sacrament* is the second volume in a four volume series on "classical pastoral care" being prepared by Thomas Oden, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Drew University. Previously published volumes in the series include *Becoming a Minister* (Vol. 1) and *Crisis Ministries* (Vol. 4). The third volume, *Pastoral Counsel*, has not yet appeared.

The purpose of the series is to provide documentary source books on classical pastoral wisdom for the use of pastors, persons in the helping professions, counselors, seminary students, and lay inquirers. The underlying rationale for the series is that "For centuries these classic texts have been regarded as treasures of Christian

memory, prized, retranslated, and passed on to the next generation. Only in our time have they fallen into disuse" (p. 1). Oden wants to make them accessible again because he believes that they can provide invaluable guidance to pastors in their work as carers of souls.

The first volume, *Becoming a Minister*, was comprised of classical pastoral writings on the calling and work of the minister. The present volume, *Ministry Through Word and Sacrament*, asks how the care-giver acts to provide nourishment and guidance for souls in eight arenas of ministry: care of oneself; pastoral care through preaching; pastoral care through prayer; pastoral care through baptism; pastoral care through confession and communion; pastoral care through educating of the soul; care of the worshipping community; and securing lay support for one's ministry. The underlying theme of the book is that pastoral care is enacted through these eight arenas, which means that the minister who enacts them faithfully is, by this very fact, engaged in pastoral care. Pastoral care is not a discrete pastoral activity, but is integral to the ministry of word and sacrament, which is, after all, the ministry to which clergy are called.

The textual material is organized around these eight themes or issues, with a chapter devoted to each, and are further subdivided under selected headings. Thus, in the chapter on the pastoral obligation to care for oneself, the classic texts are presented under these headings: care of the care-giver; difficulties intrinsic to care-giving; pastoral burnout; leaving the ministry; and healing the corruptions of sacred ministry. Each selection ranges from a couple of sentences to a page in length, and is preceded by a brief commentary by Oden designed to identify the major point of the selection, and hence, the reason for its inclusion in the volume. Typical of these brief commentaries is the following preface to a selection from Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*: "Gregory the Great reflected deliberately on ways in which pastors are called to care for themselves. Gregory thought it a particular hazard of ministry that one becomes so focused upon others' needs that one's own health and well-being might be jeopardized. The sudden death of highly competent ministers may be an oblique witness to their own myopia about their omnicompetencies" (pp. 7-8).

Selections are from the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Irenaeus, John of Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Benedict of Nursia, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola, Martin Luther, Menno Simon, Richard Baxter, The Westminster Confession, and many others. While Oden claims that the patristic texts are given preference in the series over medieval and reformation texts, I had the distinct impression as I read through this particular volume that Luther's was the dominant voice. This, however, could be due to the fact that his observations were generally more vivid and colorful than those of the patristic writers.

What to make of a text which consists largely of selections from early documents? One of the things it does, and does very well, is to provide compelling evidence that, during the patristic period, considerable consensus was reached on

most of the important pastoral care issues confronting Christian communities, and that later church leaders (medieval and reformation) relied upon these earlier writings, thus carrying this consensus forward, and transmitting it to their successors. One also gains the distinct impression that this consensus was genuinely wise, sound, and relevant. It was, on the one hand, considerate of human weakness, and, on the other hand, tough on those who flagrantly abused their Christian freedoms.

Since the literature contained few surprises, one can only surmise that this consensus is largely intact today. Even if today's pastors do not study these documents assiduously, the vast majority act in accordance with them. This is perhaps not the conclusion that Oden wishes one to draw from this material, as he seems to suggest, in his introductory comments on the series as a whole, that this consensus is threatened in our day by virtue of the fact that these writings have fallen into disuse. But it is altogether possible for ministers to carry on this tradition today without being able to cite the relevant documentary sources. The traditioning process seems to survive, and to get transmitted from one generation of pastors to another, through the various socialization and professionalization processes employed by the various denominations (such as seminary courses in pastoral care and church polity, field work and internships, ordination procedures, informal mentoring, and like). It is also quite possible that this is essentially how the process worked in the classical periods as well, i.e. as much through being socialized into the profession as through the reading of texts.

Still, it is useful to have these documentary sources available for reference and reflection. They provide a sort of catechetical instruction in pastoral care, and thus the foundation for the hard intellectual work which must follow, as we seek to make pastoral care genuinely relevant to a contemporary world which is both similar to, and yet, very different from the world of the early fathers.

DONALD CAPPS

Princeton Theological Seminary

Thulin, Richard L. *The "I" of the Sermon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 93. \$4.95.

This is the ninth volume in the sequence of monographs under the general title: "Fortress Resources for Preaching." The author, who is Ulrich Professor of the Art of Preaching at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, indicates his purpose at the outset of the Preface: "This book is about the use of personal story in preaching" (p. 9). His essay is backed up by the conviction "that the use of the first-person singular narrative can be one of the most effective forms that preaching can assume." In a time when all facets of the art and discipline of preaching are being explored and made the subject of numerous position papers, Prof. Thulin has composed a useful discussion about an area of the preacher's craft which presents demands and expertise few feel adequate to attempt and many decry



the ability to exercise. It is not untrue to say that modern communications media have put the pulpit on notice: preachers must take more seriously into account the manner in which they present their messages and be sure to understand that what they write and its literary formulation influence the former immeasurably.

For several decades we have heard and read much about sermonic methodologies—dialogue, allegory, narrative, story, inductive versus deductive approaches, etc.—all of which have been used at some time or another by princes and pundits of the pulpit for many centuries. Our danger is lest our contemporary attempts and adaptations should be merely re-runs of methods employed by our ancestors in the homiletical craft.

In the course of seven chapters (and three appendices) and with a fresh slant of thought, Prof. Thulin faces up to the problems and the critics of autobiographical preaching, always letting all of them present their case and meeting them with positive suggestions and guidelines that are not mere theories but conclusions drawn from his own implementations of this homiletical approach. Sermons that feature the “personal story” or more generally speaking, “autobiographical preaching,” call into action one’s imaginative processes as the initial prerequisite and when it is done well the by-products, according to Thulin, are honest conviction, theological truth brought to life, evaluation of one’s own life in the light of God’s word and work, self-portrayal that delineates one’s own identity, and sharing with people an understanding of the issues and vicissitudes of our common life that can be resolved through mutual discovery of what Christian renewal actually means. All such dividends are a harvest of advantages and blessings for preacher and congregation alike and, although some preachers may achieve them in and through sermons of any type, as a means of catching the ear of our age, autobiographical preaching of the kind Thulin describes and advises how best to do has singular merit.

One does not miss here many intimations of real competency on the part of the author in his analysis of contemporary sermons. We would have preferred in the appendices, however, several of his own sermons demonstrating the empathic element so well defined by the late Herbert H. Farmer. True, Thulin’s discussions are concerned more directly with recent preachers (although Weatherhead preached his last sermon in 1960!), but he might have given us his views on a related type popularized decades ago by Alexander Whyte and William Barclay in their impersonations of biblical characters and heroes. In this contemporary resurgence of the use of the personal story method in preaching, we wonder why it had not ever become a vogue with the outstanding preachers since 1920—Scherer, Buttrick, Fosdick, and others? Maybe their use of pertinent illustration (in which Henry Ward Beecher had taken the lead over against Edwards’ closely reasoned logic) was the vehicle for their autobiographical material, and their own empathetic insights gave it such extraordinary impact.

Altogether, Thulin has given us a clear and thorough handling of one method of



communicating the gospel from the pulpit. Probably it will take some decades to reach a verdict upon the liberative efficacy of this method; certainly to try it occasionally would make the Sunday homiletical diet more palatable. A question about grammatical *minutiae*: is the split infinitive (which occurs repeatedly in this essay) regarded as acceptable now as it was not when F.D.R. set the nation's pundits on their ear by using it in a fireside chat, and is "cannot help but" no longer a literary blemish in American usage?

DONALD MACLEOD  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Van Dyke, Ansley Gerard. *If I Had One More Sermon to Preach*. Toms River, New Jersey: The Toms River Presbyterian Church, 1988. Pp. 153. \$12.00.

On a Sunday in late November, 1941, just one week before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a young Princeton Seminary student named Ansley Gerard Van Dyke steered his creaking Plymouth sedan past the chicken and dairy farms of Ocean County, New Jersey and into the tranquil hamlet of Toms River. Earlier that same week, Van Dyke had been summoned to the dean's office of the seminary and told that "it was about time he began to preach" and that he had been scheduled to supply the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church of Toms River on Sunday. Van Dyke had barely heard of Toms River and hadn't the faintest idea where it was, but he checked a map and arrived at the church on time.

Evidently the little congregation of Presbyterians who heard Van Dyke that day liked what they heard, because two-and-one-half months later they called him to be their minister, and forty-six years, twenty-three hundred baptisms, nineteen hundred weddings, and twenty-two hundred sermons later, Van Dyke retired as Senior Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Toms River. When Van Dyke retired, in 1988, the membership of the congregation had grown to three thousand people.

This handsome volume of two dozen of Van Dyke's sermons was lovingly prepared by a committee from the congregation, and it includes several of his last sermons to the church along with a sample of the sermons he preached in the Toms River pulpit through the years. Though these sermons are finely-crafted and are filled with references to current books, films, and the media, they bear none of the marks of the anonymous, generic, written-for-publication sermons one often finds in such collections. Local names and the particular issues and concerns of the Toms River community abound, bearing witness to the fact that these sermons come from the hand of a working pastor, struggling to articulate the claims of the gospel upon a unique congregation in a specific time and place.

Theologically, Van Dyke is a preacher of grace. The presence of the forgiving and loving God experienced in Jesus Christ enlivens his preaching, and his sermons characteristically end with the confident and hopeful ascription, "Thanks be to God!" Van Dyke often preached series of sermons, and portions of four such series

are included in this volume: one on memory, a set of portraits of Old Testament figures, a series drawn from Jesus' farewell discourses in the Gospel of John, and a particularly provocative and interesting ensemble on "Tough Sayings of Jesus."

In his sermon on Abraham, Van Dyke asks, "What do you think it must have been like for Abram and Sarai? (They were called) not only to move, but to move to an unknown place. There was just a kind of vague promise deep within Abram's soul which was saying, 'I've got a place for you. Believe in me.'" The same could be said, I suppose, of that young seminarian, chugging along in a battered Plymouth, nearly fifty years ago, heading toward that unknown place of promise called Toms River.

THOMAS G. LONG  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Boys, Mary C. *Educating in Faith: Maps and Vision*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. 220. \$21.95.

Like everything else that we try to do, map reading is an experience shaped by many variables. The reader, the reason for consulting a map, previous experiences of map-reading, the map itself, time available—all these and more determine what we expect and what we get from our endeavors. Under pressure to get from Point A to Point B, many would get the route number and maybe the miles to be traveled. A little less pressure and a degree of familiarity with the area might evoke questions about alternative routes and recognition of other points in proximity to A or B. Those quite familiar with the territory might find themselves wondering about topography and historical significance or economic factors influencing the area.

And so it is with Mary Boys' book. It is a book to which a variety of people might come with reasonable expectations of learning. It is for beginning students in Christian religious education, for pastors and church educators, for doctoral students, and their teacher-colleagues. Boys has not written for the thoroughly initiated, although such will find illumination. She has not couched her teaching in a private language or illustrated out of a narrow context of education.

By means of sharply focused charting, lively narration of various strands of American religious education, reflection on her own experiences and practices, and substantial, bibliographic essays at the end of each chapter, Boys draws the reader into what it means to educate religiously.

Boys identifies four classic expressions of religious education ("a specific, historical manifestation of educating in faith, that has resulted from the intersection of a particular theological perspective with a particular educational outlook"): Evangelism, Religious Education, Christian Education, Catholic Education. She puts to each a series of ten foundational questions which she has inferred from the historical material. Having set this matrix or map, she explores each classic expression with the flair of a good storyteller and the consideration of a careful teacher who

respects the tradition. The result is, for the most part, absorbing reading. It can be read as an engaging account of how we got to be where we are in religious education. It can be read as a provocateur for one's own delineation of foundational questions. It can be taken as one succinct and graphic picture of the traditions in which all those who seek to educate religiously are functioning.

Chapter Six gives attention to what has happened with and to the classic expressions in the past two decades. The map functions to identify both continuities and modifications and leads to the author's delineation in Chapter Seven of what she sees in the uncharted terrain that is the future. What Boys sees is: an expanded understanding of knowledge; the contribution of different voices (particularly those of feminists) to re-thinking certain foundation questions; the maturation of the social sciences; and the emergence of a new vision of the public responsibility of the church. Whether any one reader would see the same things in the new terrain is not the point. Identifying them and describing them in relation to the tradition is well done here and can help any educator to do the same with her or his vision. For me, Mary Boys' descriptions and predictions are provocative and illuminating, often capturing in a succinct way the contributions of a number of contemporary writers and critiquing them appreciatively and helpfully.

In the concluding chapter readers are given a fine example of how one educator maps the field, preserving the tradition as a dynamic shaper of the present and appropriating developing insights in a systematic and enlivening way. Probing questions and well-founded hypotheses invite us to look to our own traditions with critical appreciation and to our work of educating in faith with realistic hope and enthusiasm. In summary, I think this is a fine and useful book, a gift to whoever you are and wherever you are.

FREDA A. GARDNER  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)*. Vol. 5: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pp. 361. \$29.95.

With his *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700)*, Jaroslav Pelikan, Sterling Professor of History at Yale University, brings to completion his five volume study entitled *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Like its predecessors, this volume is not a history of religious ideas, Christian theology, or philosophical theology, but rather a history of doctrine—an account of “what the Church has believed, taught, and confessed on the basis of the word of God.” Pelikan insists that “the church” is best understood as a chorus of consensual voices rather than a collection of soloists; consequently, Christian “tradition,” rather than the insights of particular Christian figures, governs the selection of topics, texts, and authors. Each of the book's six chapters covers a specific chronological period,

addresses a general topic under thematic divisions, and draws on material from all periods of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Pelikan examines in turn the 17th century crisis of orthodoxy (1), 18th century rationalism and pietism (2, 3), 19th century defenses of foundational Christian principles and doctrines (4, 5), and 20th century quests for a universal Christianity (6). The book as a whole describes how Christian doctrines whose truth and meaningfulness had once been simply taken for granted were increasingly called into question in the modern period: doubt and historical relativism challenged tradition and dogma in an unprecedented manner.

In this book, "doctrines" often seem to be propositions (the author's more comprehensive understanding of doctrine may be found in the section entitled "Some Definitions" in the first volume of the series). But that which makes a proposition a doctrine (and not simply a theological or philosophical remark) remains vague, especially since Pelikan does not limit doctrine to officially sanctioned church statements. It is not always clear how Pelikan knows that "the church," rather than merely an idiosyncratic soloist, is speaking, or how he can tell when "the church" has based its propositions on "the word of God." Yet he relies on implicit notions of "the church," "word of God," and hence of "orthodoxy" in order to distinguish doctrines from propositions that are merely theological, philosophical, historical, or cultural. As Pelikan indicates in the first volume of the series, his history of doctrine has as its theological presupposition "the variety of theologies and the unity of the gospel" (1:10). Some contemporary historians may wonder whether such a theological presupposition, even if it can enable one to distinguish authentic doctrine from non-doctrinal material, is compatible with critical historiography.

As Pelikan presents it, "modern culture" appears primarily as a set of high-culture, academic challenges to doctrine to which the churches were forced to respond. The author writes for readers who are more concerned to see how Christianity negotiated the discrete intellectual attacks of modernity than to understand the logic, attitudes, and convictions of modern persons throughout the social spectrum for whom Christian doctrine became increasingly unacceptable. Consequently, while readers of the chapters on the 19th century will encounter quotations from ancient and medieval contributors to the Christian chorus, they will not find any direct discussion of Feuerbach, Marx, or Nietzsche, or of the underlying cultural concerns to which their subversions of Christianity gave expression. While Pelikan's decision to write a history of doctrine is completely justifiable, this focus stands in some tension with the title's implication that modern culture (including dimensions beyond the academic or intellectual) will receive significant consideration in its own right.

Finally, Pelikan's historiographical style deserves comment. The detailed marginal reference system, the extensive direct quotation, and the assured tone of the commentary together produce a description of matter-of-fact persuasiveness. Little in the author's presentation suggests he is directly answering a question, arguing a



thesis, or debating possibilities. On the contrary, the seamless interweaving of quotation, paraphrase, and comment, the carefully-crafted thematic associations, the unobtrusive yet always visible erudition, and the architectonic structure of the whole are likely to leave readers with the sense that this is simply the way it was. Such features are the hallmarks of the most powerful interpretations, but historians may worry that Pelikan's specific historical claims are hard to identify, and even harder to assess. Despite the welcome absence of jargon and abstraction, the book's intricate synthesis of quotation and reflection does not make for easy reading; the book is designed for readers who already have a good working knowledge of the issues and the period.

Pelikan's emphasis on ecclesiastical sources and concerns, as well as his consistent treatment of the Eastern tradition (in this volume as in the entire series) will encourage scholars of Christianity in the modern age to rethink the character and scope of their field. Pastors and other religious professionals interested in the conflict between Christianity and modernity will find Pelikan's volume to be a rich and informative synthesis of many of the principal issues, understood primarily from the perspective of the churches themselves. All will marvel at the magisterial character of the achievement; few, if any, contemporary scholars have the depth of historical knowledge, the range of linguistic skills, and the ecclesiological insight that the production of such a work required.

DAVID DAWSON  
Haverford College

Johnson, Kermit D. *Realism and Hope in a Nuclear Age*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. Pp. 133. \$8.95.

Steering carefully between unrealistic hope and hopeless realism, Kermit D. Johnson offers a challenging and encouraging vision of steps to a more peaceful world. A graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and of Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div.), Johnson has recently retired from his position as Chief of the U.S. Army Chaplains.

This is an intensely personal and self-disclosing book. While it is a sophisticated moral and theological argument, it is richly anecdotal, filled with stories of Johnson's encounters with U.S. military leaders over the past two decades. It is a treasury of quotations on the morality of warfare from the vantage point of those who have sought to prevent war by being prepared for it.

Johnson begins by assuming the framework of the just war theory. He reports how, during the arms race of the late 1970s and early 1980s, his misgivings increased: how could nuclear war, even nuclear deterrence, be morally justified by the just war tradition? He invites the reader to share this personal, moral struggle. By beginning from this traditional perspective, Johnson has given us a book that speaks courageously but pastorally to Christians in military and political leadership.



He rejects the fatalistic idea that nuclear weapons are a form of divine judgment. He is equally emphatic in rejecting the blithe notion that God will not permit a nuclear war to happen. "We should not expect God to intervene, for in silence, God waits for *us* to act" (p. 102). Christian hope is no guarantee; it means only that God will go on being God, and that God does not will for us to destroy ourselves. Our future depends entirely on how we respond to this gracious will.

What realistic hope does Johnson offer? He insists that it is not enough to condemn the arms race. Specific proposals for a peaceful world must be forthcoming, and they must become the subject of continuous discussion. "It is one thing to analyze and condemn immoral policies, but quite another matter to suggest what should be done about them. I recommend that those who wish to see 'justice . . . roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream' try their hand at working out 'the details of the irrigation system.' It is a good exercise in humility" (p. 93).

With that, Johnson begins a six-page list of specific proposals for peace (pp. 94-99). Each is a modest, attainable step; but their net effect would be to transform international politics.

My biggest regret about the book is that given the rapid changes in Soviet-American relations, it is slipping out of date. Apparently it was written in the strange, pre-dawn twilight between the Reykjavik summit and the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty in December, 1987. Many of Johnson's distant hopes—a reduction in strategic nuclear forces, or a balanced reduction of conventional forces in Europe—are now distinct possibilities. As of mid-1989, the democratization of Eastern Europe and the frantic pace of arms reduction proposals are creating a concern for a newly destabilized Europe. It would be helpful to know Johnson's views of the recent pace of negotiations.

That regret aside, I regard this book as the finest individual theological assessment of the nuclear dilemma written in this decade. It is equally useful to pastors, laypersons, and study groups. It is a bridge between the church and those members who have felt alienated by the church's stance on nuclear weapons. It is a gift to the pastor in need of extending such a bridge to those Christians who seek peace through military strength.

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